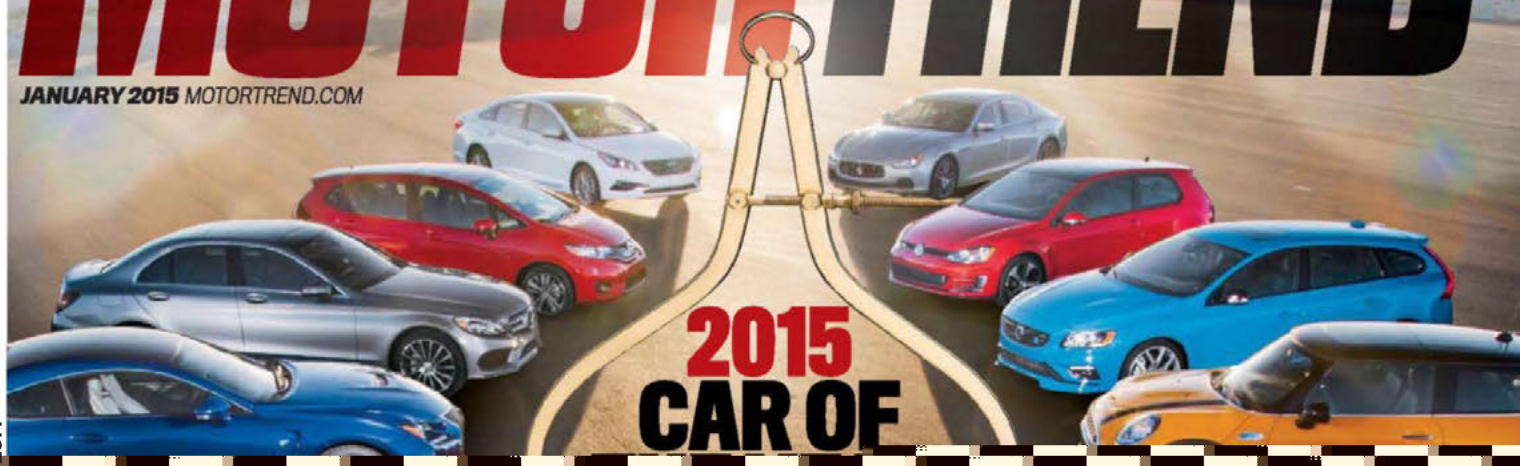
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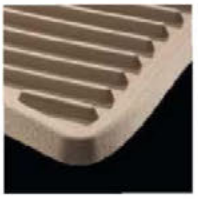


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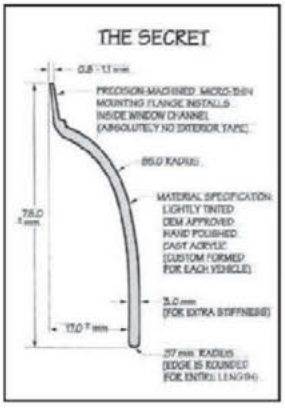
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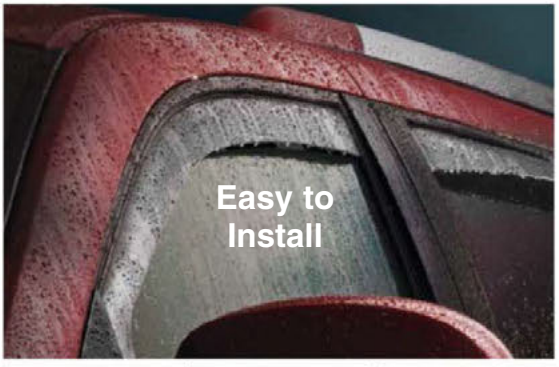
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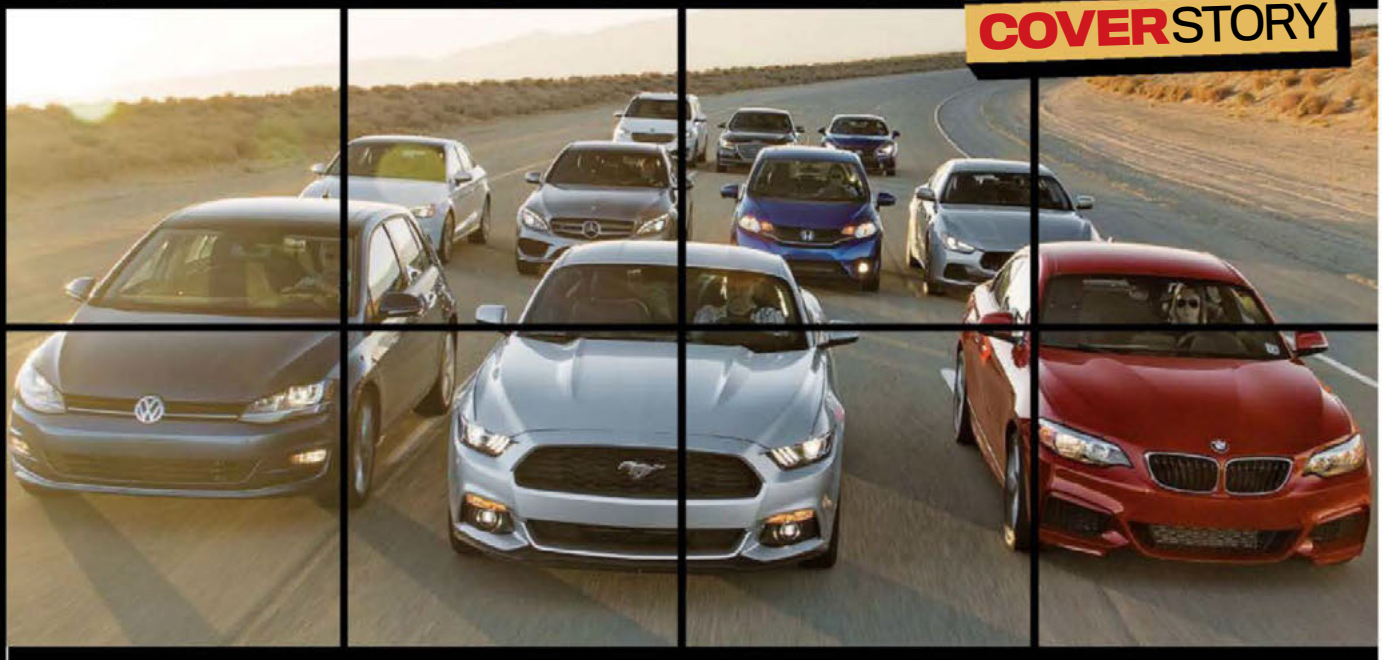
January 2015

COVER PHOTO
WILLIAM WALKER

EST. 1949 VOL. 67, NO. 1

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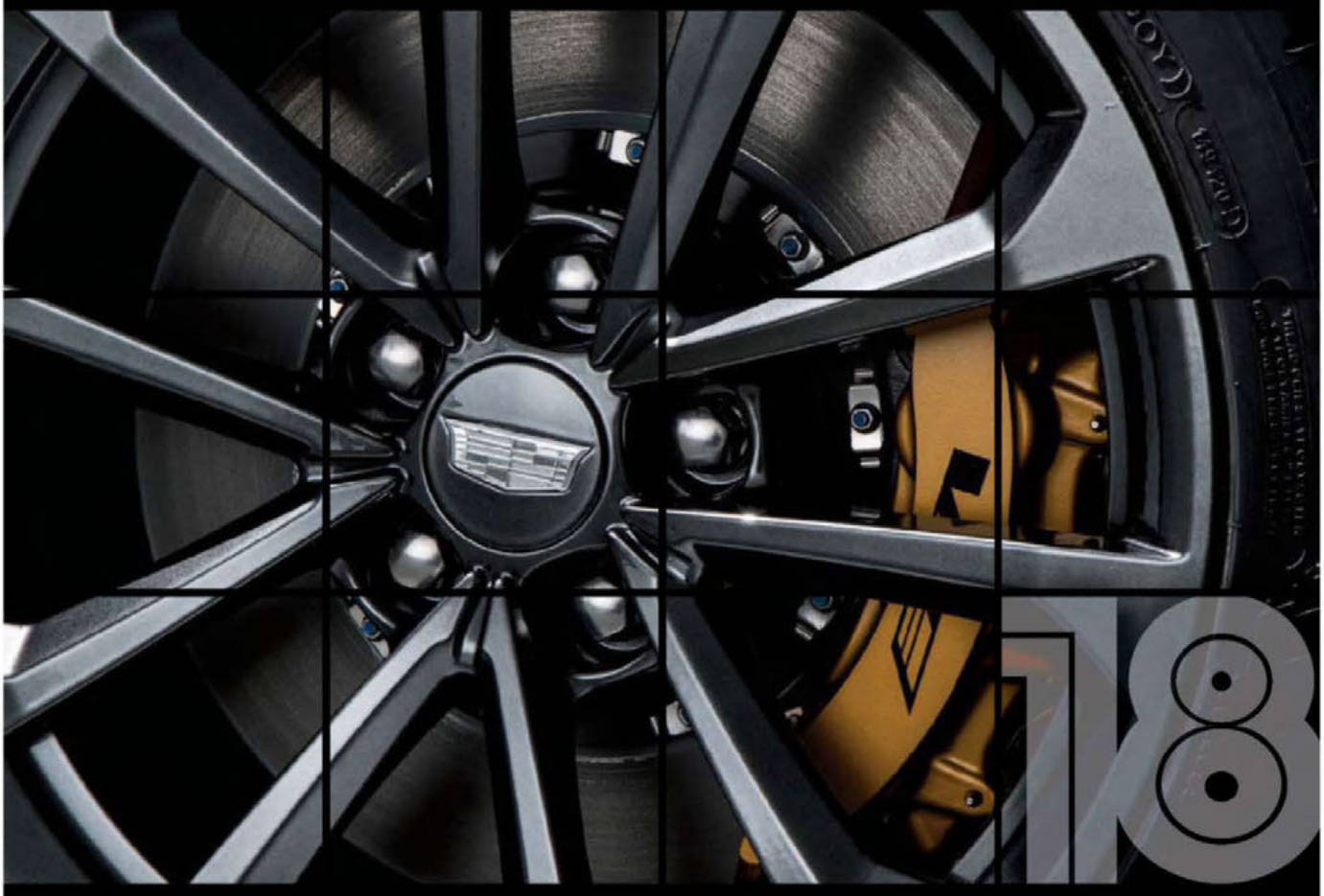
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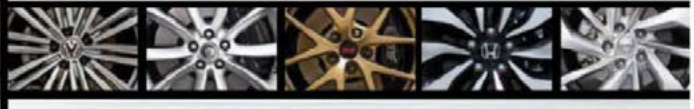
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Edward Loh @EdLoh



The Lohdown

A Master Class

Every year I remind the staff that nobody in the world does it like we do. No other media outlet gathers all of next year's new models in one place for over a week's worth of testing and driving before choosing one Car of the Year.

But the best part of COTY isn't finding out which car hits 60 the quickest or rockets around a track in the most spine-tingling fashion. The best part about COTY is the process and what we learn at every stage.

It's a car-guy master class—a highly condensed graduate-level symposium short on classroom theory and long on hands-on fieldwork. We spend days logging data and driving impressions, but also take time to huddle around each car to discuss the ins and outs of its conceptualization and design to how it was manufactured and marketed.

Our professors for these discussions are two industry legends, our longtime guest judges Chris Theodore and Tom Gale. Chris is a veteran of AMC, American Specialty Cars, Chrysler, and Ford Motor Company. He is widely regarded as the father of the Ford GT and has two other iconic Fords, the 2004 F-150 and 2005 Mustang, on his resume. He also left his mark on such groundbreaking hits as the Chrysler PT Cruiser, Dodge Viper, Plymouth Prowler, and Jeep Grand Cherokee.

Tom started as an engineer at Chrysler working on Lee Iacocca's game-changing K-car platform before switching to design. He climbed the ranks of the styling department during one of Chrysler's most turbulent eras, eventually rising to become its influential head of design. In his portfolio are such stunners as the 1995 Chrysler Atlantic concept, myriad cab-forward LH platform-mates (Eagle Vision, Dodge Intrepid, Chrysler 300M, Concorde, and LHS) and the dramatic 1994 Dodge Ram pickup. Tom and Chris also worked together to bring the jaw-dropping Plymouth Prowler and Dodge Viper to market, seemingly untouched from concept form.

Together these two have decades of the highest-level experience in the auto industry and the most amazing inside tales of Detroit's brightest hours and darkest decisions. Every year, every staffer, from seasoned veteran to fresh-faced rookie, benefits from the knowledge they drop.

"Tom has an amazing knack for enunciating what just feels kind of wrong in some designs. This year's treatise on hem flanges and the way good body stamping control allows a parking-lot line to read straight across panel gaps, where it waves around on poor stampings, was another great lesson," said Frank Markus, our technical director and former Chrysler engineer. "Chris never fails to notice engineering features I miss—like pretend shock-tower braces (Volvo Polestar) and matching crash boxes (last year's Mazda3 and Mazda6 and this year's A3/Golf). He also has Randy Pobst's knack for identifying the likely culprit of a ride/handling complaint, be it too firm bushings, insufficient spring rate, jounce-steer, overaggressive caster, etc."

Tom and Chris focus on details you would only notice if you spent decades developing cars.

Associate editor Rory Jurnecka was particularly impressed by Chris' depth of insight: "It's always interesting to ask for Chris' thoughts on what certain items cost—for example, the cost of the Mustang's independent rear suspension. 'How much extra would it have cost per car to make this trim piece out of real aluminum?' Only someone with deep production knowledge can tell you that."

Our newest COTY judge, Christian Seabaugh, summed up what it's like to learn from a master designer: "Before I couldn't really explain what about any particular car made it a 'good' design, but after talking and listening to Tom, I feel as if I've learned a whole new language."

On behalf of the staff and readers of *Motor Trend*, I'd like to thank Tom and Chris for another year's worth of priceless automotive insights. ■



OUR GURUS Grain and gloss, hem flanges and crashboxes—Tom (left) and Chris don't just know the jargon. They invented it.

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GEAR, FACTS, INFO

2015 Cadillac ATS-V

SQUARING OFF AGAINST M3/M4

The ATS sedan and coupe have fared well against their counterparts at BMW—the 3 and 4 Series—and now Cadillac is readying its assault on the top-end M variants of Bavaria's finest. As has been rumored forever, the ATS-V will be motivated by a variant of the CTS Vsport's V-6 that is significantly upgraded from that car's 420 hp/430 lb-ft to more than 450/450 in the ATS-V. This LF4 engine will be backed by a choice of a six-speed manual with active rev-matching for patient purists who don't care about winning races, or an eight-speed auto that shifts quicker than a Porsche PDK twin-clutch box. With it, expect to hit 60 mph in less than 4 seconds en route to a 180-plus-mph top speed. To cool all that angry combustion, the front grille area increases by about 50 percent, with air escaping via extractors in the hood and fenders.

Helping turn that power into the fastest Nürburgring times any Cadillac has ever achieved (sorry, no numbers yet) are suspension upgrades that include 50 percent increased roll stiffness front and rear, bushings stiffened 11-50 percent, and the toe-control links getting cross-axis steel-ball bushings for near-zero deflection. The third-gen Magnetic Ride Control dual-coil system doubles the magnetic force acting on the metal particles, which, along with





"For me, it is a horror scenario when a car going autonomous makes the first accident."

THEY SAY P32 INTERVIEW
DR. THOMAS WEBER, BOARD MEMBER, DAIMLER

YOUR SAY P34
READERS TALK BACK

greatly increased processing power, permits 40 percent faster damping response. The max damping rate is also up 40 percent.

Broadening the footprint are fat 255/35R18 front and 275/35R18 rear Michelin Pilot Sport tires with bespoke "Twaron belt" tread compound that varies from hard on the outboard edges to prevent shoulder wear to stickier in the middle to stickiest on the inside. Wider tires on higher-offset wheels push the outer edge of the tires outboard 2.2 inches total in front and 1.5 in the rear. We're told to expect 1.0g max lateral grip at least. Forged 9-inch-wide front and 9.5-inch-wide rear wheels save about 1.3 pounds per corner. Stopping power comes from 14.6-inch front and 13.3-inch rear steel rotors chomped by six-piston front and four-piston rear calipers, all Brembo and standard on all models. There's also an electronic limited-slip differential.



SHOW AND GO Yes, that spoiler on the trunk is comically large, but it's also seriously functional on the racetrack.

All ATS-V models get a ventilated carbon-fiber hood, the big grilles, brake-cooling ducts, a chin splitter, flared and vented fenders, side sill extensions, rear diffuser and spoiler, and quad tailpipes. Opt for the Track Pack, and the front splitter and rear spoiler each extend about an inch to produce measurable downforce. To offset some of the drag this adds, wind deflectors ahead of the front wheels help smooth airflow, and the side sills are extended. Inside, carbon fiber and suede-like material abounds, with Recaro seats and a Performance Data Recorder like the Corvette's optional.

We'll have more closer to the ATS-V's on-sale date, but for now chief engineer Dave Leone recommends an eight-speed automatic coupe with Track Pack as the ultimate M4 slayer at the Green Hell. **Frank Markus**





Intake



Volkswagen XL Sport Concept
Ducati Power Meets Volkswagen Efficiency

It's been two and a half years since Audi, through its Lamborghini subsidiary, bought Italian motorcycle maker Ducati for a reported $1.1 billion. We still have no idea why, but the union is now bearing some very tempting, if unexpected, fruit. If only it had been named something more tempting than XL Sport.

Based loosely on the hyper-efficient Volkswagen XL1 hybrid, the XL Sport puts the XL1's lessons in aerodynamics and weight savings to a performance application. Even more interesting, it's powered by Ducati's Superquadro V-Twin engine. Featuring desmodromic valve control, titanium connecting rods, and an 11,000-rpm redline, the 1.2-liter twin is Ducati's most powerful engine, with 197 hp and 99 lb-ft of torque. Borrowed from the limited-edition 1199 Superleggera motorcycle, the engine resides in the middle of the XL Sport and drives the rear wheels via VW's seven-speed dual-clutch gearbox and a step-down transmission that reduces engine speed by a factor of 1.86—because cars don't want to rev to 11,000 rpm.



Though longer, wider, and taller than the XL1, the XL Sport weighs just over 200

Infiniti Working On Larger, Smaller Sedans

Infiniti's sedan range will expand both upward and downward over the next five years. The Q80 Inspiration concept car shown at the Paris Motor Show is very much an indication for a flagship due in four years.

It will follow the Q30, a four-door front-drive hatchback to be built in the U.K. starting next year. The Q30 sits on Mercedes' A-Class platform. Answering a question from *Motor Trend* on the eve of the show, Nissan-Infiniti CEO Carlos Ghosn said: "We will enlarge Infiniti's product offer. It will move up and down [beyond the Q30]. Not for the next three years, but long-term."

Group design director Shiro Nakajima confirmed that they are already doing advanced work on a Q20. The Q80 Inspiration runs a brand-new 3.0-liter V-6 with twin turbos, plus a hybrid system. The V-6 makes 440 hp alone, giving an electrically boosted total of 550 hp. Performance is stated at "less than 4.0 seconds" for 0-62 mph.





SEE THE LIGHT The XL Sport takes weight reduction to the extreme with tiny half-windows and a Spartan interior.



pounds more at a featherweight 1,962 pounds thanks in part to its carbon-fiber-reinforced polymer bodywork. That body has been refined extensively to maintain its slipperiness through the air while satisfying the need for downforce at higher speed and more cooling air for the engine. With a coefficient of drag of 0.26, it's not as sleek as the XL1 at 0.19, but Volkswagen claims it's still the best in the sports car business. Its carbon-fiber monocoque rides on a high-strength steel sub-frame connected to a control-arm suspension design at all four corners. The rear uses familiar pushrod-actuated, inboard shock absorbers while the front uses a pullrod design, essentially an upside-down pushrod design. Carbon-ceramic brakes and magnesium alloy wheels reduce unsprung weight while significantly wider tires (than the XL1) should improve cornering grip.

Altogether, Volkswagen says the XL Sport will hit 60 mph from a stop in 5.7 seconds, about the same as a V-6 Toyota Camry but more than twice as quickly as the XL1. Top speed is said to be 168 mph.

Volkswagen has made no allusions to the XL Sport's production potential, but we're holding out the vain hope that the company's willingness to build a small number of XL1s for public consumption will be extended to this intriguing little sports car. **Scott Evans**



The engine and the concept car's nine-speed auto will make their debut in an Infiniti two years from now, said product strategy director Francois Bancon. Is it related to a Daimler engine? "No, but it will be available to them." Will it be used in Nissans? "No, it's too expensive. It's a high-performance engine."

He continued: "By 2019 Infiniti will have 100 percent more powertrains than now and 60 percent more models."

Asked about the Eau Rouge concept, he said: "Our intention is to do it. And to do a performance version—maybe not as high-performance as the Eau Rouge—in each category."

What about a pure sports coupe? "That's another story. We have some ideas but nothing concrete. We're not in a hurry, as it's a small market. The young people we target aren't so much driven by the idea of a sports car. It's too egotistic for them."

The Q80 Inspiration also previews autonomous drive technologies. Said Ghosn: "We are pioneering it because it gives more control to the driver, not less. It's not about the driverless car. It lets the driver drive when he wants."

Infiniti's head in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, François Goupil de Bouillé, says the production Q80 "will have the highest performance in its segment." He added: "You remember the show car for the Q30? It was 90 percent of the real thing. We have the same intention here." **Paul Horrell**

/ / /

Chevrolet SS

Intake



ABSOLUTE POWER
The 707-hp Charger Hellcat is the world's most powerful production four-door sedan.

2015 Dodge Charger

Newcomer



There are few cars more revered (and feared) on the market today than the Dodge Challenger Hellcat. With a 707-hp, 650-lb-ft supercharged 6.2-liter Hemi V-8 mounted up front, the two-door Challenger Hellcat has staked its claim among the most powerful production cars in the world. And now Dodge has taken that same powertrain mated to the same eight-speed automatic and stuffed it into its newly redesigned "practical" car, the full-size, four-door Charger sedan. The end result is sheer madness, of course: 0-60 mph in an estimated 3.7 seconds, the quarter-mile run in an NHRA-verified 11.0 seconds, and a top speed of 204 mph. On street tires. All this for just under $65,000.

Of course, there are more responsible ways to dispose of less cash. Dodge is continuing to make Chargers with a variety of powertrains, all the way from the base 292-hp, 3.6-liter V-6-powered SE and SXT models through the 370-hp, 5.7-liter Hemi V-8-powered R/T and into the R/T Scat Pack and SRT 392 models with a 485-hp, 6.4-liter Hemi V-8 underhood (15 hp and 5 lb-ft more than in 2014). Optional all-wheel drive is offered only with the V-6-powered Charger for 2015, and all cars are treated to Dodge's excellent new eight-speed automatic gearbox. Electric power steering is now found in every Charger except the Hellcat, which sticks with a hydraulic unit.

All cars also get new-for-2015 styling inside and out, with the Charger's corners tucked in for a more compact look, all-LED lighting front and rear, a sleeker Dart-esque nose, revised C-pillar, and massaged front door chamfers. We especially like the new Viper-inspired hood on the SRT 392. Dodge says only the roof and rear doors are left untouched. The interior is also significantly revised, with real aluminum trim around the instrument panel and shifter console, along with a new three-spoke steering wheel and available higher-quality materials.

A brief drive in wet conditions showed the Hellcat model to be a Jekyll and Hyde-type car, composed and even comfortable on the road and an absolute monster on the track. Is there a better way to get the kids to school? **Rory Jurnecka**



SPECIFICATIONS **Base Price** $28,990-$64,990 **Vehicle Layout** Front-engine, RWD/AWD, 5-pass, 4-door sedan **Engines** 3.6L/292-300-hp/260-264-lb-ft DOHC 24-valve V-6; 5.7L/370-hp/395-lb-ft OHV 16-valve V-8; 6.4L/485-hp/475-lb-ft OHV 16-valve V-8; 6.2L/707-hp/650-lb-ft supercharged OHV 16-valve V-8 **Transmission** 8-speed automatic **Curb Weight** 3,950-4,600 lb (mfr) **Wheelbase** 120.2-120.4 in **Length x Width x Height** 198.4-200.8 x 75.0 x 58.2-58.3 in **0-60 MPH** 3.7-7.0 sec (*MT* est) **EPA City/Hwy/Comb Fuel Econ** 13-19/22-31/16-23 mpg **Energy Cons., City/Hwy** 177-259/109-153 kW-hrs/100 miles **CO2 Emissions, Comb** 0.84-1.22 lb/mile **On Sale in U.S.** Spring 2015

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New muscle-car method: turbo, AWD, and a luxe badge

At this year's Car of the Year program, the all-new 2015 Mustang GT was easily the most talked about and anticipated performance car of the field. After all, it ushered in a new generation of Ford's ponycar and touted legit muscle-car stats, thanks to a hulking 5.0-liter V-8, six-speed manual, and—finally—independent rear suspenders. Indeed, the 3,814-pound thoroughbred from Flat Rock, Michigan, boasted 435 hp and 400 lb-ft of torque and, despite the intense Mojave heat, posted 0-60 in 4.4 seconds, the quarter mile in 12.8 at 112.2 mph, 60-0 in 107 feet, average lateral acceleration of 0.96 g, and the figure eight in 24.7 seconds. Solid (unlike that rear axle). Yet two other hi-po machines, one from this year's program and one from last year's, left me thinking: There's a new wave of muscle car, and it ain't big eights, stick shifts, and rear drive wrapped in red, white, and blue.

To wit: The Teutonic duo of the Audi S3 and Mercedes-Benz CLA45 AMG each put down performance figures comparable to the GT's but did so with relatively tiny-displacement turbo engines, dual-clutch gearboxes, and all-wheel drive. And for what it's worth, unlike that Blue Oval on the 'Stang's hood, ritzy luxury-marque badges adorn these compacts.

The 292-horse S3 marks the first time an S-badged A3 has made it Stateside, and boy, was it well worth the wait. Essentially a Volkswagen Golf R hot hatch in sedan guise offered exclusively with a six-speed DCT, the S3 can also be viewed as a mini S6. It bears a strong resemblance to its big bro, has half the cylinders and turbos, yet is nearly as quick and agile. In our desert venue, the 3,467-pound Audi zipped from 0-60 in 4.7 seconds, through the quarter in 13.4 at 102.4, and halted from 60 in 113 feet. And thanks in part to 280 lb-ft of torque and spiffy split-spoke 19s shod in sticky 235/35 Continentals, it pulled average lateral acceleration of 0.92 g and ran the figure eight in 25.2. The beautifully appointed interior and taut and tidy exterior didn't hurt, either. Easy to hustle and confidence-inspiring, the S3 may prompt you to see some red mist, but it'll never leave you with white knuckles. The Mustang? As its name suggests, it can be a wild horse.

Speaking of wild rides, let's talk CLA45 AMG. By wild, I'm not referring to its handling, which, akin to the Audi, is predictable (read: mild understeer) and reassuring. No, I'm talking about its straight-line gusto of 0-60 in 4.2 seconds and the quarter in 12.7 at 108.3. That's what 355 high-strung horses, all-wheel drive, and a rapid-fire, seven-speed DCT can do for you. Halting the 3,599-pound Benz from 60 required just 109 feet, average lateral grip came in at 0.96 g, and the figure eight registered in 24.9 ticks—all right near or on top of the Mustang. While not a styling star like the S3, both inside and out, the CLA offers up better steering and, in addition to the 63 extra horses, 52 more lb-ft of twist.

I realize comparing two petite Germans to the bigger, brawnier Mustang is an apples-to-oranges endeavor. But I can't help but think that for ballpark money—$46,380 for the Mustang, $49,945 for the S3, $58,945 for the CLA45 (OK, Benz is out of the ballpark)—the Europeans provide similar performance, real back seats, and superior EPA fuel economy (23/31 mpg city/highway versus 15/25). Lean and mean versus bulk and brute. In true American fashion, it's nice having choices. ■

MIGHTY MOUSE **The CLA45's 355-hp 2.0T is the mightiest four-cylinder production engine around.**

There's a new wave of muscle car, and it ain't wrapped in red, white, and blue.

HORSE PLAY **Despite a 435-hp, 5.0L V-8, the Mustang GT can't match the quickness of the CLA45 AMG.**

IMPORTANT FACTS about ELIQUIS® (apixaban) tablets

℞ ONLY

The information below does not take the place of talking with your healthcare professional. Only your healthcare professional knows the specifics of your condition and how ELIQUIS may fit into your overall therapy. Talk to your healthcare professional if you have any questions about ELIQUIS (pronounced ELL eh kwiss).

What is the most important information I should know about ELIQUIS (apixaban)?

For people taking ELIQUIS for atrial fibrillation: Do not stop taking ELIQUIS without talking to the doctor who prescribed it for you. Stopping ELIQUIS increases your risk of having a stroke. ELIQUIS may need to be stopped, prior to surgery or a medical or dental procedure. Your doctor will tell you when you should stop taking ELIQUIS and when you may start taking it again. If you have to stop taking ELIQUIS, your doctor may prescribe another medicine to help prevent a blood clot from forming.

ELIQUIS can cause bleeding which can be serious, and rarely may lead to death. This is because ELIQUIS is a blood thinner medicine that reduces blood clotting.

You may have a higher risk of bleeding if you take ELIQUIS and take other medicines that increase your risk of bleeding, such as aspirin, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (called NSAIDs), warfarin (COUMADIN®), heparin, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) or serotonin norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs), and other medicines to help prevent or treat blood clots.

Tell your doctor if you take any of these medicines. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure if your medicine is one listed above.

While taking ELIQUIS:

- you may bruise more easily
- it may take longer than usual for any bleeding to stop

Call your doctor or get medical help right away if you have any of these signs or symptoms of bleeding when taking ELIQUIS:

- unexpected bleeding, or bleeding that lasts a long time, such as:
  - unusual bleeding from the gums
  - nosebleeds that happen often
  - menstrual bleeding or vaginal bleeding that is heavier than normal
- bleeding that is severe or you cannot control
- red, pink, or brown urine
- red or black stools (looks like tar)
- cough up blood or blood clots
- vomit blood or your vomit looks like coffee grounds
- unexpected pain, swelling, or joint pain
- headaches, feeling dizzy or weak

ELIQUIS is not for patients with artificial heart valves.

Spinal or epidural blood clots (hematoma). People who take a blood thinner medicine (anticoagulant) like ELIQUIS, and have medicine injected into their spinal and epidural area, or have a spinal puncture have a risk of forming a blood clot that can cause long-term or permanent loss of the ability to move (paralysis). Your risk of developing a spinal or epidural blood clot is higher if:

- a thin tube called an epidural catheter is placed in your back to give you certain medicine
- you take NSAIDs or a medicine to prevent blood from clotting
- you have a history of difficult or repeated epidural or spinal punctures
- you have a history of problems with your spine or have had surgery on your spine

If you take ELIQUIS (apixaban) and receive spinal anesthesia or have a spinal puncture, your doctor should watch you closely for symptoms of spinal or epidural blood clots or bleeding. Tell your doctor right away if you have tingling, numbness, or muscle weakness, especially in your legs and feet.

What is ELIQUIS?

ELIQUIS is a prescription medicine used to:

- reduce the risk of stroke and blood clots in people who have atrial fibrillation.
- reduce the risk of forming a blood clot in the legs and lungs of people who have just had hip or knee replacement surgery.
- treat blood clots in the veins of your legs (deep vein thrombosis) or lungs (pulmonary embolism), and reduce the risk of them occurring again.

It is not known if ELIQUIS is safe and effective in children.

Who should not take ELIQUIS?

Do not take ELIQUIS if you:

- currently have certain types of abnormal bleeding
- have had a serious allergic reaction to ELIQUIS. Ask your doctor if you are not sure

What should I tell my doctor before taking ELIQUIS?

Before you take ELIQUIS, tell your doctor if you:

- have kidney or liver problems
- have any other medical condition
- have ever had bleeding problems
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. It is not known if ELIQUIS will harm your unborn baby
- are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. It is not known if ELIQUIS passes into your breast milk. You and your doctor should decide if you will take ELIQUIS or breastfeed. You should not do both

Tell all of your doctors and dentists that you are taking ELIQUIS. They should talk to the doctor who prescribed ELIQUIS for you, before you have **any** surgery, medical or dental procedure.

Tell your doctor about all the medicines you take, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. Some of your other medicines may affect the way ELIQUIS (apixaban) works. Certain medicines may increase your risk of bleeding or stroke when taken with ELIQUIS.

How should I take ELIQUIS?

Take ELIQUIS exactly as prescribed by your doctor. Take ELIQUIS twice every day with or without food, and do not change your dose or stop taking it unless your doctor tells you to. If you miss a dose of ELIQUIS, take it as soon as you remember, and do not take more than one dose at the same time. **Do not run out of ELIQUIS. Refill your prescription before you run out.** When leaving the hospital following hip or knee replacement, be sure that you will have ELIQUIS available to avoid missing any doses. **If you are taking ELIQUIS for atrial fibrillation, stopping ELIQUIS may increase your risk of having a stroke.**

What are the possible side effects of ELIQUIS?

- See **"What is the most important information I should know about ELIQUIS?"**
- ELIQUIS can cause a skin rash or severe allergic reaction. Call your doctor or get medical help right away if you have any of the following symptoms:
  - chest pain or tightness
  - swelling of your face or tongue
  - trouble breathing or wheezing
  - feeling dizzy or faint

Tell your doctor if you have any side effect that bothers you or that does not go away.

These are not all of the possible side effects of ELIQUIS. For more information, ask your doctor or pharmacist.

Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. You may report side effects to FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088.

This is a brief summary of the most important information about ELIQUIS. For more information, talk with your doctor or pharmacist, call 1-855-ELIQUIS (1-855-354-7847), or go to www.ELIQUIS.com.

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We Say...



Frank Markus
TECHNOLOGUE

Illustration Umberto Mischi

Lawyering Up for Autonomy

The Intelligent Transportation Systems community gathered in Detroit in September to kick around the big issues confronting connected and autonomous vehicles, and two panel discussions on the topic of liability concerns caught my eye. I secured a press pass, grabbed a seat front and center, and learned a little more about the legal landscape these technologies will be entering.

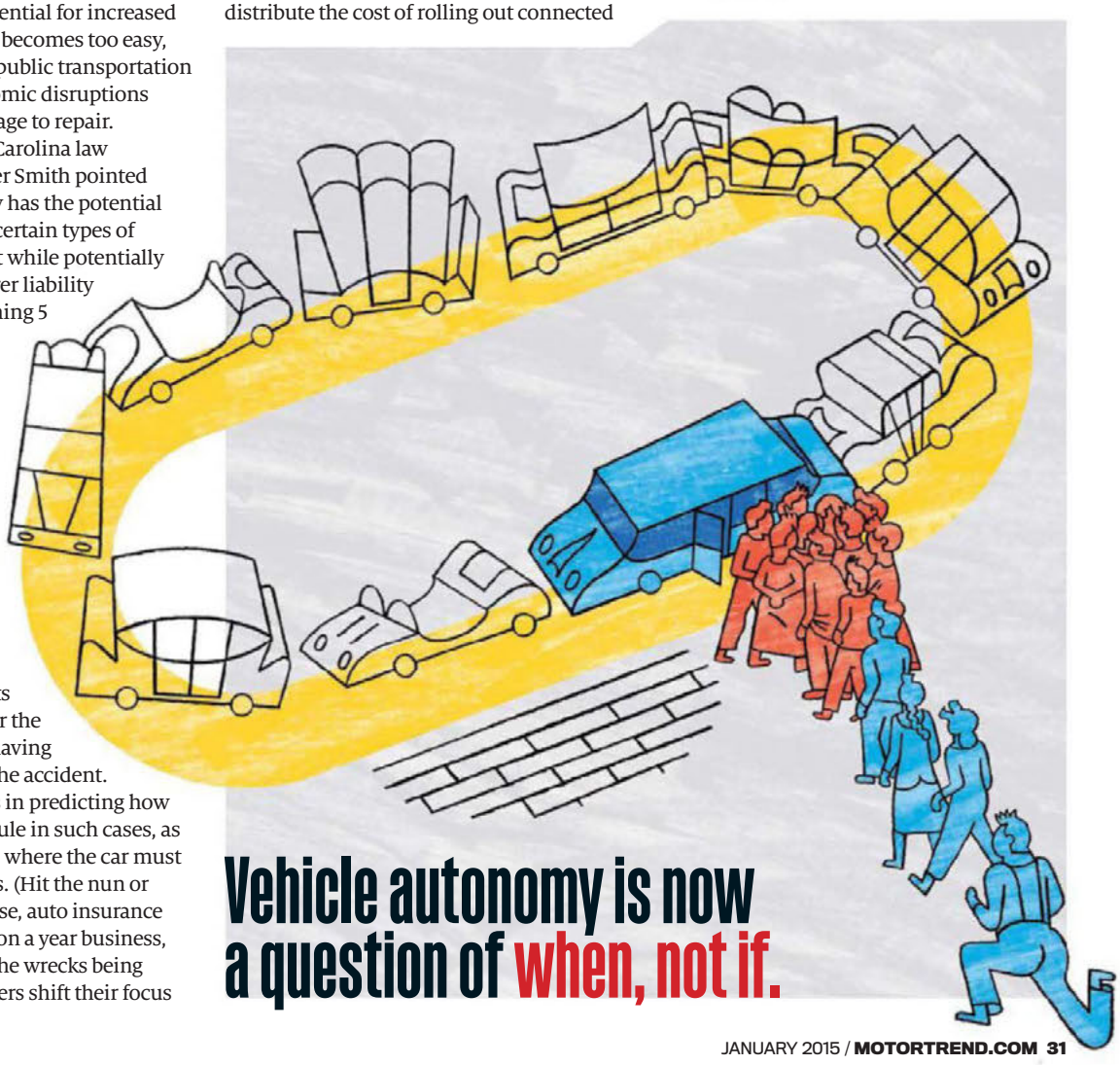
Most panelists agreed that vehicle autonomy is now a question of when, not if, as attested by forecasts such as one by Boston-based Lux Research predicting that the technology will become an $87 billion business by 2030. The experts identified the benefits: greatly increased safety, mobility for current non-drivers, reduction of congestion with platooning, and reduced fuel consumption. And they outlined costs and risks: the potential for increased congestion if car travel becomes too easy, dramatic reduction in public transportation usage, and other economic disruptions such as less crash damage to repair.

University of South Carolina law professor Bryant Walker Smith pointed out that the technology has the potential to reduce incidents of certain types of accidents by 95 percent while potentially increasing manufacturer liability exposure in the remaining 5 percent. He discussed two risk elements to consider when predicting future liability: exposure and uncertainty. For example, in most T-bone wrecks today, the blame goes to the driver who ignored the traffic signal. If the innocent victim's vehicle is automated, however, its driver might come after the manufacturer for not having foreseen and avoided the accident. The uncertainty comes in predicting how judges and juries will rule in such cases, as well as in trickier cases where the car must choose between targets. (Hit the nun or the 5-year-old?) Of course, auto insurance is currently a $200 billion a year business, but with 95 percent of the wrecks being prevented, might insurers shift their focus to covering manufacturers against litigation in the remaining 5 percent?

Future judges might also consider the argument that "yes, this time the tech caused a death, but it's saving 30,000 lives a year." After all, early airbags killed some out-of-position children, and many juries recognized that the benefits of the technology outweighed the parental negligence of allowing a child to ride leaning against an airbag.

Another interesting precedent: Vaccination saves countless lives, but when an adverse reaction injures or kills someone, victims are compensated from a special fund without suing the manufacturer. Might automakers hatch a similar deal? Maybe. If society determines that the benefits of the technology outweigh its costs (including potential liability), we could devise a system of user fees and subsidies to distribute the cost of rolling out connected and autonomous vehicles. Owners of older cars with lower levels of connectivity and autonomy (or none) would pay higher fees to partially subsidize the cost of the safer cars that, in theory, will never run into them.

In closing, the panel of lawyers opined that our legal system is agile enough to adapt to whatever challenges this new technology poses, and the RAND Corp.'s James Anderson cautioned against crafting preemptive laws, noting that "we get such legislation wrong a lot." The Brookings Institution concurred in its report titled "The Robots are Coming," stating that "Preemptively resolving liability issues should not be a precondition to commercial rollout of autonomous vehicles." Soon we'll learn whether the auto industry believes that agility will threaten or ensure its long-term survival. ■



Vehicle autonomy is now a question of when, not if.

Siri meats Cody

This Car of the Year, a few of our intrepid judges put down pen and pad in favor of their company-issued smartphones for note taking. The dictation feature provided by the Apple iPhone 5S proved quicker and more convenient than writing by hand, but had occasional humorous lapses. **Can you match the mistranslated name to the COTY contender below?**

We'll give you the first one.

1. FORD
MUSTANG
EGO BOOST

A.

2. ALFA MAIL
FOR SEE

B.

3. CHEYENNE
DAY GENESIS 5.0

C.

4. KEIA CANINE
HUNDRED

D.

5. HOWDY
832.0 T CUATRO

E.

VMT3B

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We took 10 cars forward this year to tackle the real-world road loop in Tehachapi, California. This 28.5-mile mix of highway, city, and tight canyon roads starts in the parking lot of our hotel and heads west for a bit on California Highway 58. We double back through Tehachapi before climbing the 4,000-plus-foot pass in the Tehachapi Mountains between Bakersfield and Edwards Air Force Base. The route snakes back toward Highway 58 via a tight, two-lane country road. We focus on how the finalists perform on real-world roads. Judges pay attention to road and wind noise, steering response, and ride quality. They test audio, climate, and infotainment systems, including things like navigation, smartphone pairing, hands-free voice controls, active cruise control, and lane-keeping technology. After all the driving, we discuss/bicker/scream and choose the 2015 Car of the Year.

1. Tehachapi Boulevard Low-speed stop-start driving tests transmission calibration and smoothness, throttle and brake tip-in, and low-speed ride. Also tests all-around visibility in traffic.

2. Tehachapi-Willow Springs Road Broken pavement tests whether tire noise is adequately suppressed and whether noise, vibration, and harshness are transmitted through the suspension into the vehicle's body structure.

3. Tehachapi-Willow Springs Road summit, about 5,000 feet A sustained climb from 4,014 feet tests engine torque and transmission response under light throttle load, and a sustained descent to 4,147 feet tests the effectiveness of the cruise control.

4. Cameron Road A challenging canyon road with mid-corner elevation changes induces major transient loads at just 45–55 mph. Ideal for evaluating steering response, chassis balance, and body control. Plus, it's fun.

5. Rail Crossing 1 A sharp bump at 10 mph tests effectiveness of suspension noise and impact harshness suppression.

6. Freeway Patched and broken concrete induces tire noise and high-frequency vibrations. Smooth asphalt tests ride quality in a typical commuting situation, as well as wind noise and effectiveness of the audio system. Also allows for testing of cruise control, both passive and active safety systems such as lane departure, and semi-autonomous driving modes. Also tests passing power.

7. Rail Crossing 2 Angled crossing induces twisting loads through suspension, plus noise, vibration, and harshness, providing a good assessment of chassis rigidity.

FAMILY

Subaru Legacy

We Like Improved styling, AWD functionality, the car's honesty.



We Don't Like
Back-of-the-pack performance and handling, lack of innovation.



With the exception of pickup trucks, no segment in the auto biz is as closely contested as midsize family sedans. Not only are the perennial best-sellers—Accord and Camry, take your pick—really good vehicles, but so are the pretenders to the CamCord throne: Mazda6, Passat, Optima, Sonata, and Fusion. If you're going to try to compete with this gaggle of smartly engineered, aggressively focus-grouped mensches, you need to stand out. This doesn't leave the Subaru Legacy much room to maneuver.

The Legacy actually does pretty decently against many of our key criteria. Value, Safety, Efficiency, and even Performance of Intended Function all jump to mind. However, in terms of Advancement in Design and Engineering Excellence, the Legacy is playing catch-up with the others. Let's start with design. MacKenzie calls it "a reasonably generic, almost nondescript four-door sedan" and feels that "the interior is similarly unspectacular." Gale notes, "Overall design is very conservative with a long front overhang, which seems heavy due to smaller wheel graphics. Not as inspired as others in the segment."

As for Engineering Excellence, the 2.5-liter Legacy tied with the Kia Soul EV for slowest 0-60 time—9.2 seconds. That's half a second off the poky Chrysler 200C (8.7 seconds) and almost a full second behind the Hyundai Sonata 2.4-liter (8.4 seconds). You can't chalk the Legacy's relative turtleness up to power or weight, both of which are quite laudable in the class, so it's gotta be the CVT. MacKenzie again: "The CVT is slightly soul-destroying."

The big problem with the Legacy, however, is the rest of the competition. We couldn't even sort out if the Legacy was the best midsize family car in the test, let alone the segment. Everyone appreciated the one unique attribute the Legacy—like most every Subaru—brings to the table: all-wheel drive. But that simply wasn't enough to move the needle and impress the judges. Theodore says it best: "The Subaru Legacy, however, breaks no new ground as a Car of the Year contender."

Jonny Lieberman

2015 Subaru Legacy	2.5 Premium	3.6R
Base Price / As Tested	**$24,290** / $27,180	**$30,390** / $33,380
0-60 mph	**9.2** sec	**7.0** sec
Quarter Mile	**17.0** sec @ 84.9 mph	**15.3** sec @ 96.5 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	**120** ft	**123** ft
Lateral Acceleration	**0.83** g (avg)	**0.78** g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	**27.6** sec @ 0.63 g (avg)	**27.6** sec @ 0.64 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb.	**26/36/30** mpg	**20/29/23** mpg
Energy Cons., City/Hwy	**130/94** kW-hrs/100 miles	**169/116** kW-hrs/100 miles
CO2 Emissions, Comb.	**0.65** lb/mile	**0.83** lb/mile

Vehicle Layout Front-engine, AWD, 5-pass, 4-door sedan **Engine 2.5 Premium** 2.5L/175-hp/174-lb-ft DOHC 16-valve flat-4 **3.6R** 3.6L/256-hp/247-lb-ft DOHC 24-valve flat-6 **Transmission** Cont. variable auto **Curb Weight (F/R Dist) 2.5 Premium** 3,508 lb (59/41%) **3.6R** 3,720 lb (59/41%) **Wheelbase** 108.3 in **L x W x H** 188.8 x 72.4 x 59.0 in

FAMILY **CONTENDERS**

Kia Soul and Soul EV

We Like Value price and feature-rich cabin; killer electric version.



We Don't Like
Coarse engine and gone-hunting transmission.

Love or hate its dancing hamster ads, there's no arguing the fact that the Kia Soul has struck a chord with buyers. Now in its second generation, Kia is looking to take all that its buyers loved about the first Soul and put it in a bigger package.

Wider and longer than before, the new Soul carries its new visual weight well. "Exterior design is a terrific rework of the original that gives the new Soul a more premium feel without losing that fun character of the original," MacKenzie said. The Soul doesn't just look more upmarket from the outside; it actually is on the inside. The funky-yet-functional interior includes Kia's Uvo infotainment system, mood lighting that syncs with music, and both heated and cooled seats. "Cooled seats!" Lieberman said. "What a welcome feature in California City!"

Buyers currently have a choice of three different powertrains for the Soul: a (not provided for us) 130-hp 1.6-liter I-4, a 2.0-liter I-4 making 164 hp, and, for the first time ever, an electric motor. The EV powertrain is the most compelling. Offering up an EPA-estimated 93 miles of range, the Soul EV was the electric favorite of the judges. "Wow. I think Mercedes-Benz and BMW have a huge problem here," Loh said. "This Soul EV is the love child between them, yet some $10,000 cheaper. Cute and quirky without pushing it like the i3 ... this might be the EV choice for those in the know."



While the Soul EV wowed us, we were a bit less impressed with the gas-powered Soul's performance characteristics. It's not that we were expecting the gasser to blow our socks off, but we wanted a bit more refinement. The 2.0-liter gets coarse higher in its rev range, which is unfortunate because you need to spend a fair amount of time there while accelerating due to the slow-shifting six-speed auto. "The car struggled to get up to 90 mph," Lieberman said. Evans agreed: "Slow. Power feels barely adequate ... Passing on the freeway pretty much requires flooring it." So while it's a better all-around package than before and a killer value in the segment, the Soul didn't stir us enough to earn a finalist nod.

Christian Seabaugh

2015 Kia Soul	(!)	Eco Electric (+)
Base Price / As Tested	**$15,900** / $26,715	**$34,500** / $36,625
0-60 mph	**8.3** sec	**9.2** sec
Quarter Mile	**16.4** sec @ 86.2 mph	**17.0** sec @ 80.4 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	**116** ft	**126** ft
Lateral Acceleration	**0.79** g (avg)	**0.76** g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	**27.9** sec @ 0.75 g (avg)	**28.6** sec @ 0.64 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb.	**23/31/26** mpg	**120/92/105** mpg-e
Energy Cons., City/Hwy	**147/109** kW-hrs/100 miles	**28/37** kW-hrs/100 miles
CO2 Emissions, Comb.	**0.75** lb/mile	**0.00** lb/mile (at vehicle)

Vehicle Layout Front-engine, FWD, 5-pass, 4-door hatchback **Engine/Motor (!)** 2.0L/164-hp/151-lb-ft DOHC 16-valve I-4 **Eco Electric (+)** 109-hp/210-lb-ft electric **Transmission (!)** 6-speed automatic **Eco Electric (+)** 1-speed automatic **Curb Weight (F/R Dist) (!)** 3,129 lb (61/39%) **Eco Electric (+)** 3,336 lb (58/42%) **Wheelbase** 101.2 in **L x W x H** 163.0 x 70.9 x 63.0 in

We Like *Architectural Digest* design.

We Don't Like
Slippy/tippy handling unbecoming of the Roundel.

The Prius taught the world that if you want your alternative powertrain to sell, you'd best give it a unique wrapper. BMW took that lesson to heart when designing its i sub-brand's mainstream offering, and the i3's design inspired copious commentary. "In design terms, it's trying pretty hard, but doesn't look geeky, nor does it have the boiled-toad appearance of a Nissan Leaf," MacKenzie said. Adds Loh, "Love, love, love the interior and exterior design. The materials are inviting/touchable, bold and concept car-y." Kiino said the interior "feels like you're driving a spaceship, with the floating screens, huge dash, and big windshield," while Burgess found "a goofiness about the i3 that I enjoy" and Seabaugh called the interior "absurd but genuinely interesting."

Look beyond the quirkiness, and you find a rear seat that's tricky to access through the rear-hinged half-doors, with windows that don't open and a high floor that kills rear thigh support for adults. Behind that is a "puny trunk" that Lieberman posits wouldn't even accommodate a set of iGolf clubs. The start/stop button is poorly positioned behind the steering wheel rim, there's a peculiar rotary shifter on the steering column, the cruise control inexplicably slows down when negotiating a turn, and there are loads of other "features" that are just "weird for the sake of being weird," as Seabaugh noted.

But our biggest collective gripe was with the handling, which was pretty much what you'd expect of a tall, tippy car on skinny tires—but not what we expect of a BMW. Sure, the 0.80 g lateral grip sounds good, but exploring it cupped the tires after four or five hot laps of the Winding Track. Hard cornering was attended by the sound of a "Star Trek" phaser. "The handling is so bad I simply cannot take the car seriously," Lieberman proclaimed. Burgess declared its performance "so bad it should lose its BMW badge." So while the i3 scored high in Engineering Excellence, Design, and Efficiency (81-mile EPA range, city!), it missed our finalist cut by a fair margin. **Frank Markus**

2014 BMW i3 eDrive

Base Price / As Tested	**$42,275** / $48,675
0-60 mph	**6.4** sec
Quarter Mile	**15.3** sec @ 89.0 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	**108** ft
Lateral Acceleration	**0.80** g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	**27.2** sec @ 0.69 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb.	**137/111/124** mpg-e
Energy Cons., City/Hwy	**25/30** kW-hrs/100 miles
CO2 Emissions, Comb.	**0.00** lb/mile (at vehicle)

Vehicle Layout Rear-motor, RWD, 4-pass, 4-door hatchback
Motor 170-hp/184-lb-ft electric **Transmission** 1-speed automatic
Curb Weight (F/R Dist) 2,864 lb (48/52%) **Wheelbase** 101.2 in
L x W x H 157.8 x 69.9 x 62.1 in

We Like Great-looking. Side mirrors glow green while charging.

We Don't Like
Louder gas engine than the Volt's, and performance doesn't feel greater.

"The wrong car at the wrong time at the wrong price." That was MacKenzie's bottom line on the Cadillac ELR. He's right. Why is the ELR the wrong car? It's just not big enough. Look at electric vehicles people love (basically, the Tesla Model S), and you'll notice they're big. Full-size, in fact. Next, unless we're talking sports cars, Americans still think that a big price should equal a big car. The ELR's base price is higher than every other Cadillac, save the top-trim Escalades. Yet the ELR is the second-smallest car Caddy sells—it's slightly bigger outside than the ATS. Cadillac's most expensive car is also the brand's dullest performer. The Model S, on the other hand, can go toe to toe with Caddy's racehorse, the CTS-V.

As for the wrong time, the ELR could have worked if not for the Chevy Volt. Say huh? Isn't the ELR based on the Volt? It sure is, and that's the crux of the problem. When the Volt debuted (and we named it our 2011 Car of the Year), consumers struggled to make sense of a $40K Chevy. Eventually, the constant downward pressure on the Volt's price (and lease price) helped to get more and more people into Volts. But then you come out with a Cadillac halo vehicle that's heavily and obviously based on a Chevy. It smacks of the dreaded C-word: Cimarron.

Now, had GM possessed the foresight to launch the ELR first and follow it up years later with Volt, that strategy may have worked. Maybe hindsight being crystal-clear, it's hard to argue in favor of the decision to launch a $75K vehicle just after bankruptcy and bailouts. Those are what you'd call bad optics.

In a bubble, there's nothing wrong with the ELR. Its aggressive cab-forward design is handsome, especially when viewed from behind. The cabin is luxuriously trimmed out, and (with the exception of CUE) is a nice indication of where Cadillac design is headed. But while it's a very nice Volt, the ELR's just not a great Cadillac. Nor is it our 2015 Car of the Year. **Jonny Lieberman**

2014 Cadillac ELR

Base Price / As Tested	**$75,995** / $76,160
0-60 mph	**7.3** sec
Quarter Mile	**15.8** sec @ 91.9 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	**125** ft
Lateral Acceleration	**0.81** g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	**27.0** sec @ 0.72 g (avg)
EPA Comb. Econ Gas/EV	**33 mpg/82** mpg-e (37-mile range)
Energy Cons., Comb. Gas/EV	**102/41** kW-hrs/100 miles
CO2 Emissions, Comb. Gas/EV	**0.59/0.00** lb/mile (at vehicle)

Vehicle Layout Front-engine, FWD, 4-pass, 2-door coupe
Engine 1.4L/84-hp/92-lb-ft (est) DOHC 16-valve I-4 plus 181-hp/295-lb-ft electric motors, 162 hp/295 lb-ft comb **Transmission** Cont. variable auto
Curb Weight (F/R Dist) 4,040 lb (61/39%) **Wheelbase** 106.1 in
L x W x H 186.0 x 72.7 x 55.9 in

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The Finalists...

Photo William Walker

TEN BEST



FROM THE ANSWER TO THE UNIVERSE* WE CUT TO THESE TEN FINALISTS. FROM THIS PACK COMES ONE WINNER.

*42

ECONOMY

Honda Fit

We Like Magical seating and packaging, sprightly dynamics. **We Don't Like** Thrashy engine note, 2 tons of styling on a 1.5-ton car.



The Fit charmed our judging panel like a Jack Russell puppy—infectiously cute, eager to please, with a million great moves guaranteed to leave folks smiling. It bounded over most of our criteria hurdles with ample clearance. Its intended function is to provide compact, utilitarian, inexpensive transportation, and in doing so it runs rings around its competitors. Evans praised the upgraded interior (which gets optional leather and seat heaters) for being "less funky, more functional." MacKenzie noted it comfortably accommodates four adults his size (6-plus feet). Fold the rear seat cushion up against the backrest, and you can stand a bike up. Drop the "magic seat" flat to the floor to open up 52.7 cubic feet worth of space—3.2 cubes more than a Jeep Cherokee can handle, in a package that's a third smaller outside. MacKenzie proclaimed Fit "the most rational, intelligent B-segment car in the world."

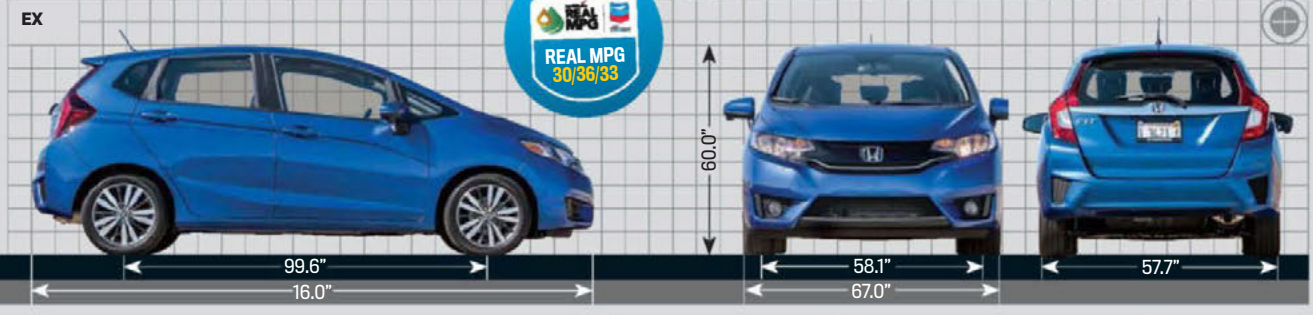
Direct-injection boosts power by 11 percent (to 130) and broadens the torque curve, which peaks 8 lb-ft higher at 114. Paired with either a new six-speed manual or the Civic's slick paddle-shifted CVT, the new Fit hustles to 60 mph in 7.9 or 9.1 seconds—an improvement of 0.3 and 1.1 seconds respectively. But its unexpectedly playful chassis beguiled us more than its straight-line speed: "Had almost as much fun driving this manual as I did in the GTI," said Evans. "It is a fun car to hustle around," said Theodore, adding, "The ride control is excellent for a small car, with little suspension harshness on any of the Special Surfaces—it even handled manhole covers better than some midsize and luxury sedans! Quite an accomplishment."

Value and Efficiency are perennial Honda strong suits as well. So why isn't this story several pages farther back? Like that Jack Russell pup, the Fit is kinda yappy. Loh found "the engine a bit thrashy at wide-open throttle." "Drones hard at 5,000 rpm—like an angry blender," said Evans. Theodore opined that the engine block wasn't stiff enough for DI duty. But it's still mighty darned lovable. **Frank Markus**

2015 Honda Fit	EX	EX-L
Base Price / As Tested	**$18,225** / $18,225	**$20,590** / $20,590
Power (SAE net)	**130** hp @ 6,600 rpm	**130** hp @ 6,600 rpm
Torque (SAE net)	**114** lb-ft @ 4,600 rpm	**114** lb-ft @ 4,600 rpm
Accel, 0-60 mph	**7.9** sec	**9.1** sec
Quarter Mile	**16.0** sec @ 86.4 mph	**16.8** sec @ 85.8 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	**130** ft	**130** ft
Lateral Acceleration	**0.80** g (avg)	**0.79** g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	**28.3** sec @ 0.65 g (avg)	**28.6** sec @ 0.64 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb.	**29/37/32** mpg	**32/38/35** mpg

Vehicle Layout Front-engine, FWD, 5-pass, 4-door hatchback





Engine/Transmission EX 1.5L/130-hp/114-lb-ft DOHC 16-valve I-4/6-speed manual **EX-L** 1.5L/130-hp/114-lb-ft DOHC 16-valve I-4/cont. variable auto

Curb Weight (F/R Dist.)
EX 2,578 lb (61/39%)
EX-L 2,637 lb (62/38%)

Energy Consumption, City/Hwy
EX 116/91 kW-hrs/100 mi
EX-L 105/89 kW-hrs/100 mi

CO2 Emissions
EX 0.60 lb/mi
EX-L 0.56 lb/mi

FINALISTS LUXURY

Audi A3

MOTOR TREND CAR OF THE YEAR 2015

We Like Loads of fun to drive, great looks. **We Don't Like** Gets very expensive very quickly.



2.0T Quattro

When it comes to the compact luxury sedan class, the Value criterion can be a tough one to pin down because it's not always a matter of X features for Y money. To many people, the badge on the trunk carries a great deal of value by itself, but you can't really measure that. Rather than measure, though, automakers bank on it.

Value is the single biggest reason the A3 isn't Car of the Year. At just under $31,000 to start, the opening bid makes a strong case. Add features, though, and the proposition quickly sours, especially when you realize what isn't included in the base price. For example, the mid-range A3 2.0 Quattro in our test rang in at more than $37,000 as-tested and did not include automatic climate control, a backup camera, or parking sensors. It did, though, have a $350 option that provided the software and cable necessary to make an iPod or iPhone work with the stereo. Driving the point home were a number of blank buttons prominently displayed on the center stack.

Pricing gets even more ridiculous when you look at the S3, which stickers for one tank of premium gas shy of $50,000.

Also working against the A3, from the standpoint of our test criteria, was the design. While we all agreed it's a very good-looking car, it is in no way an advancement for Audi. A number of judges also remarked that the interior design was nearly too minimalist and almost devoid of color.

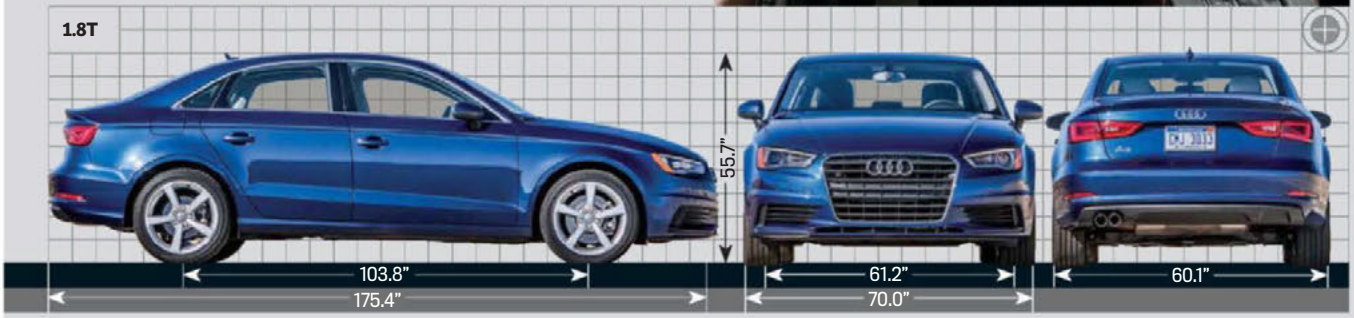
As for the rest of the criteria, the A3 did very well. Judges loved the chassis, which seemed to only get better with speed. All models handled extremely well and were very well-controlled in corners and over bad pavement. The MQB platform on which it's based is a proven winner in safety tests, and all models displayed decent efficiency for the class.

As much as we liked the new A3, none of us could overlook the Volkswagen Golf sitting next to it. Riding on the same platform, it did almost everything as well as the Audi and a few things better for a lot less money. There's intrinsic value in those four rings on the A3's trunk, but not enough to vault it into the winner's circle. **Scott Evans**

2015 Audi A3/S3	1.8T	2.0T Quattro	S3
Base Price/As Tested	**$30,795** / $34,345	**$33,795** / $37,195	**$41,995** / $49,945
Power (SAE net)	**170** hp @ 4,500 rpm	**220** hp @ 4,500 rpm	**292** hp @ 5,400 rpm
Torque (SAE net)	**200** lb-ft @1,600 rpm	**258** lb-ft @1,600 rpm	**280** lb-ft @ 1,900 rpm
Accel, 0–60 mph	**7.3** sec	**5.6** sec	**4.7** sec
Quarter Mile	**15.7** sec @ 89.2 mph	**14.3** sec @ 98.3 mph	**13.4** sec @ 102.4 mph
Braking, 60–0 mph	**124** ft	**121** ft	**113** ft
Lateral Acceleration	**0.86** g (avg)	**0.87** g (avg)	**0.92** g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	**26.8** sec @ 0.75 g	**25.9** sec @ 0.76 g	**25.2** sec @ 0.81 g
EPA City/Hwy/Comb.	**23/33/27** mpg	**24/33/27** mpg	**23/31/26** mpg



Vehicle Layout Front-engine, FWD, 5-pass, 4-door sedan



Engine/Transmission 1.8T 1.8L/170-hp/200-lb-ft turbo DOHC 16-valve I-4/6-speed twin-clutch auto **2.0T Quattro** 2.0L/220-hp/258-lb-ft turbo DOHC 16-valve I-4/6-speed twin-clutch auto **S3** 2.0L/292-hp/280-lb-ft turbo DOHC 16-valve I-4/6-speed twin-clutch auto

Curb Weight (F/R Dist.)
1.8T 3,140 lb (60/40%)
2.0T Quattro 3,349 lb (58/42%)
S3 3,467 lb (58/42%)

Energy Consumption, City/Hwy
1.8T 147/102 kW-hrs/100 mi
2.0T Quattro 140/102 kW-hrs/100 mi
S3 147/109 kW-hrs/100 mi

CO2 Emissions
1.8T 0.73 lb/mi
2.0T Quattro 0.71 lb/mi
S3 0.75 lb/mi

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Hyundai Genesis

MOTOR TREND CAR OF THE YEAR 2015

We Like Stately exterior and smooth, quiet ride. **We Don't Like** Its body roll and V-8 performance.



The Hyundai Genesis was a welcome surprise for many judges. The large premium sedan combines luxury, performance, and style in a very elegant manner. "The Genesis is a real evolution," MacKenzie said. "Hyundai has changed the things that were wrong with the last one. It's a lot of car for the money. It's the kind of car that very few carmakers have managed to do in that segment." Indeed, Hyundai has found the sweet spot between sporty import sedans and traditional big, quiet rides.

Many editors preferred the 3.8-liter V-6 mated to the eight-speed automatic transmission over the 5.0-liter V-8 for its overall performance. The 3.8-liter V-6 creates 311 horsepower and 293 lb-ft of torque and delivers the power very nicely to the all-wheel-drive platform. By the numbers, the 5.0 outperformed the V-6 model, but not by what the potential price difference suggests. The smaller-engine Genesis felt more nimble on the track and very well-mannered on the Tehachapi loop. "If I wanted a straight luxury car, not a sport sedan," Evans said, "this one would make a very strong case for itself."

Both cars, which have the Fluidic Sculpture 2.0 design language, offer stately, if not understated, looks. Both were extremely smooth on the road, and quiet. "This car is dead silent at 90 mph, exactly how a luxury car should be," Seabaugh said.

Add to that the luxurious appointments throughout the cabin, such as the flat wood-grain and aluminum trim, and high-tech driving features including lane keep assist and blind-spot detection, and the Genesis is a complete package. The rotating knob control on the center console was also easy to use while driving.

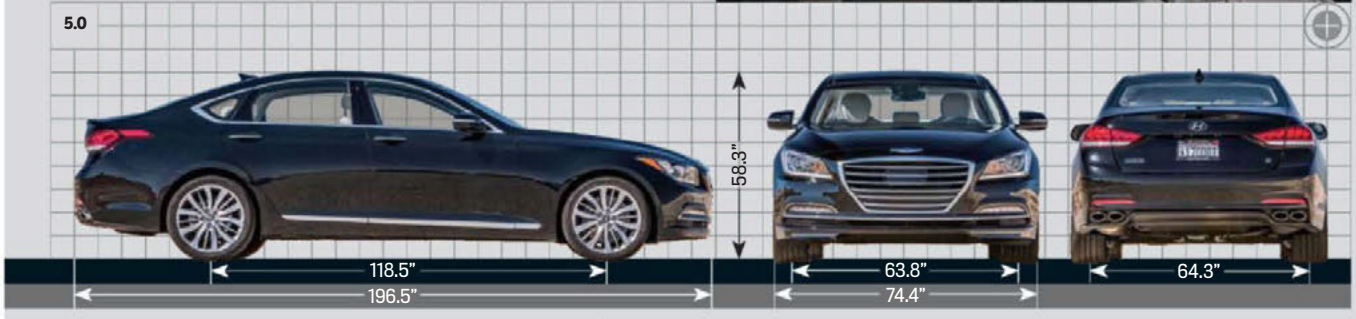
"Very upscale interior," Loh said. "Logical control layout, high-end look and feel, though there are a few too many buttons."

The comfortable riding position, adjustable driver modes, and smooth ride moved the Genesis higher on many judges' lists, as the Genesis delivers more than promised. The speed with which Hyundai has moved up in the luxury car segment in America has been quite impressive. **Scott Burgess**

2015 Hyundai Genesis	3.8 HTRAC	5.0
Base Price / As Tested	**$41,450** / $52,450	**$52,450** / $55,700
Power (SAE net)	**311** hp @ 6,000 rpm	**420/407** hp @ 6,000* rpm
Torque (SAE net)	**293** lb-ft @ 5,000 rpm	**383/372** lb-ft @ 5,000* rpm
Accel, 0-60 mph	**6.3** sec	**5.4** sec
Quarter Mile	**14.6** sec @ 97.0 mph	**13.8** sec @ 102.8 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	**115** ft	**114** ft
Lateral Acceleration	**0.86** g (avg)	**0.86** g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	**26.2** sec @ 0.69 g (avg)	**26.6** sec @ 0.67 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb.	**16/25/19** mpg	**15/23/18** mpg

Vehicle Layout Front-engine, RWD, 5-pass, 4-door sedan





Engine/Transmission **3.8 HTRAC** 3.8L/311-hp/293-lb-ft DOHC 24-valve V-6/ 8-speed automatic
5.0 5.0L/420-hp/383-lb-ft* DOHC 32-valve V-8/ 8-speed automatic

Curb Weight (F/R Dist.)
3.8 HTRAC 4,510 lb (52/48%)
5.0 4,599 lb (52/48%)

Energy Consumption, City/Hwy
3.8 HTRAC 211/135 kW-hrs/100 mi
5.0 225/147 kW-hrs/100 mi

CO2 Emissions
3.8 HTRAC 1.02 lb/mi
5.0 1.09 lb/mi

*Premium fuel ratings, 407 hp, 372 lb-ft on regular fuel

Maserati Ghibli

We Like Four-door Ferrari moves. **We Don't Like** Boutique build quality, Chrysler-bin bits.

The first Maserati to shimmy under our COTY price ceiling ($125,000 this year) aims to crash the German exec-sedan party. The design beguiled most judges, with Gale praising the overall proportions, front and rear graphics, and "squat feel to the overall package," and MacKenzie admiring the way "the low-slung grille pouts provocatively."

Of course, it was the dynamics of *il tridente* that got us raving. "Every sedan here, especially any RWD one, wishes it drove like this car. Huge power, huge grip, very neutral handling with a little rotation at entry and mild understeer at the limit—what a fun car!" Evans said. "An absolute blast—the rocket ship in our test group," Burgess said. Theodore enthused, "It sticks well and goes where you point it better than some of its German competitors." We especially appreciated the eight-speed automatic's swift and anticipatory Sport mode shifting.

The Ghibli's test numbers trailed its principal German competitors' in nearly every objective measure. This was partially attributable to ultra-hot, low-barometric-pressure test conditions that strained our weather correction, but it was mostly due to the weight it carries as a result of its aging, cut-down Quattroporte architecture. At 4,610 pounds, it outweighs recent test samples of all its chief competitors. Nevertheless, the engine note and chassis dynamics earned it a finalist slot.

On the public roads, more than a few shortcomings came into sharper focus. "Build quality is haphazard, with some poor panel and trim fits," Theodore noted. MacKenzie added: "Hidden away to the left of the steering column, the strangely placed starter button reveals the Ghibli's other major flaw—dismal ergonomics. The cruise control was impossible to operate, for example." Railroad crossings revealed secondary body quivering, and grooved pavement led the steering to wander.

The Ghibli will undoubtedly upset the segment, but as much as we crave a long-term tester, we just couldn't muster a sufficient case against the criteria for awarding it the calipers. **Frank Markus**

2015 Maserati Ghibli Q4

Base Price / As Tested	**$79,150** / $86,540
Power (SAE net)	**405** hp @ 5,000 rpm
Torque (SAE net)	**406** lb-ft @ 4,500 rpm
Accel, 0-60 mph	**4.8** sec
Quarter Mile	**13.4** sec @ 104.8 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	**109** ft
Lateral Acceleration	**0.91** g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	**25.5** sec @ 0.80 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb.	**15/25/18** mpg

Vehicle Layout Front-engine, AWD, 5-pass, 4-door sedan

Ghibli Q4

57.5"

Engine/Transmission 3.0L/405-hp/406-lb-ft twin-turbo DOHC 24-valve V-6/ 8-speed automatic

Curb Weight (F/R Dist.) 4,610 lb (52/48%)

Energy Consumption, City/Hwy 225/135 kW-hrs/100 mi

CO2 Emissions 1.06 lb/mi



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Kia Sedona

MOTOR TREND CAR OF THE YEAR 2015

We Like Handsome design and First Class seats—finally, a minivan for grownups! **We Don't Like** Fussy seat mechanisms, reduced third-row headroom.



Here's a surprising statistic for you to chew on: According to Kia, 45 percent of minivan buyers are empty nesters. That's a pretty sizable market, and Kia is looking to cash in with the all-new Sedona, the last model in the automaker's lineup to benefit from Kia's new design language.

And benefit it does. The Sedona certainly makes a case for itself as the most handsome minivan on the market. "The big truck-like grille gives the Sedona a tough, masculine demeanor while making an emphatic brand statement. There's no mistaking this vehicle is a Kia," MacKenzie said. The lone minivan at this year's Car of the Year also made a big case for itself inside. Our swanky Sedona SXL came loaded with goodies including black-and-tan antimicrobial Nappa leather, a whisper-quiet cabin, and Kia's First Class Lounge captain's chairs, which turn the minivan's second row into the best seats in the house. While judges loved the Sedona's seats, all found the mechanisms cumbersome and difficult to operate, and the SXL's second sunroof eats up headroom for third-row passengers.

When it comes to engineering excellence, the Sedona mostly impresses with rock-solid steering and confident dynamics, with Loh declaring, "I'd like to believe I could outpace the Kia K900 on the winding road." The performance specs suggest otherwise, and the Sedona's 276-hp 3.3-liter V-6 doesn't inspire that confidence. The engine feels powerful off the line, but power quickly tapers off unless the pedal is firewalled. The ride was mostly good, too, though the Sedona's suspension proved vulnerable to secondary vibrations from poor pavement.

As compelling as the Sedona may be, it ultimately isn't our first-ever minivan Car of the Year. The "why" is simple: The Sedona aces four of the six criteria, but measly fuel economy numbers and seat mechanisms that seem more complicated than nuclear physics resulted in low grades for Efficiency and Performance of Intended Function. A great grownup minivan the Sedona may be, but it's not our Car of the Year.

Christian Seabaugh

2015 Kia Sedona SXL	
Base Price / As Tested	**$40,595** / $43,295
Power (SAE net)	**276** hp @ 6,000 rpm
Torque (SAE net)	**248** lb-ft @ 5,200 rpm
Accel, 0-60 mph	**7.9** sec
Quarter Mile	**16.1** sec @ 89.2 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	**122** ft
Lateral Acceleration	**0.78** g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	**28.0** sec @ 0.70 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb.	**17/22/19** mpg

Vehicle Layout Front-engine, FWD, 7-pass, 4-door van



REAL MPG 17/24/20



Engine/Transmission 3.3L/276-hp/248-lb-ft DOHC 24-valve V-6/ 6-speed automatic

Curb Weight (F/R Dist.) 4,764 lb (56/44%)

Energy Consumption, City/Hwy 198/153 kW-hrs/100 mi

C02 Emissions 1.02 lb/mi

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BMW 2 Series

MOTOR TREND CAR OF THE YEAR 2015

We Like The pure driving experience and potent powertrains. **We Don't Like** Being nickel-and-dimed for Bluetooth audio, iPod connectivity, and navigation.



It's really easy to be cynical about the BMW 2 Series. It's small, priced in a way that allows BMW to move the 3 Series upmarket, and it's completely devoid of standard amenities. Shut down that left brain, though, and the 2 Series starts to make a bit of sense. If there's one Car of the Year criterion the new BMW 2 Series excels at, it's Performance of Intended Function. With the 2 Series, BMW engineers set out to return the Ultimate Driving Machine to its roots, evoking the legendary BMW 2002 in the process.

To that effect, BMW largely succeeds. The BMW 228i and M235i are up there among the most fun-to-drive BMWs the company has built in years. Don't believe me? Ask Markus: "The 228i is a major hoot to drive on the winding road." Or Lieberman: "Totally sweet little track car. Great power, great balance. Most important, fun." Loh on the M235i: "It definitely wants to be driven sideways. Fantastic engine!"

The keys to the 2 Series' success are its two wonderful engines: a 2.0-liter I-4 making 240 hp and 255 lb-ft of torque in the 228i and a 3.0-liter I-6 producing 320 hp and 330 lb-ft in the M235i. Both powerplants are paired to an eight-speed automatic. "With both 228i and M235i, BMW serves up an object lesson in powertrain engineering," MacKenzie said. "The eight-speed automatic has been brilliantly calibrated to the engine's power and torque curves." While the M235i was the hot rod of the two, most staffers agreed the M Sport-optioned 228i was the one to have on back roads.

So where does it fall apart for the 2 Series? Just about everywhere else, especially in value. Simply put, the 2 isn't one. These cars were bare-bones for their near mid-century sticker prices. No navigation, no iPod connectivity, no Bluetooth audio, no power seats, no backup cameras—nothing. "Ridiculously overpriced," Loh said. "It's especially galling when you come out of a Kia or Hyundai." The 2 Series may be an honest-to-goodness BMW in the classic sense and true to the brand's Ultimate Driving Machine moniker, but it isn't our Car of the Year.

Christian Seabaugh

2014 BMW 2 Series	228i	M235i
Base Price / As Tested	**$33,050** / $38,250	**$44,050** / $46,050
Power (SAE net)	**240** hp @ 5,000 rpm	**320** hp @ 5,800 rpm
Torque (SAE net)	**255** lb-ft @ 1,450 rpm	**330** lb-ft @ 1,300 rpm
Accel, 0-60 mph	**5.2** sec	**4.5** sec
Quarter Mile	**13.9** sec @ 98.5 mph	**13.1** sec @ 105.6 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	**113** ft	**108** ft
Lateral Acceleration	**0.89** g (avg)	**0.92** g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	**25.6** sec @ 0.77 g (avg)	**25.1** sec @ 0.79 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb.	**23/36/28** mpg	**22/32/25** mpg

Vehicle Layout Front-engine, FWD, 4-pass, 2-door coupe



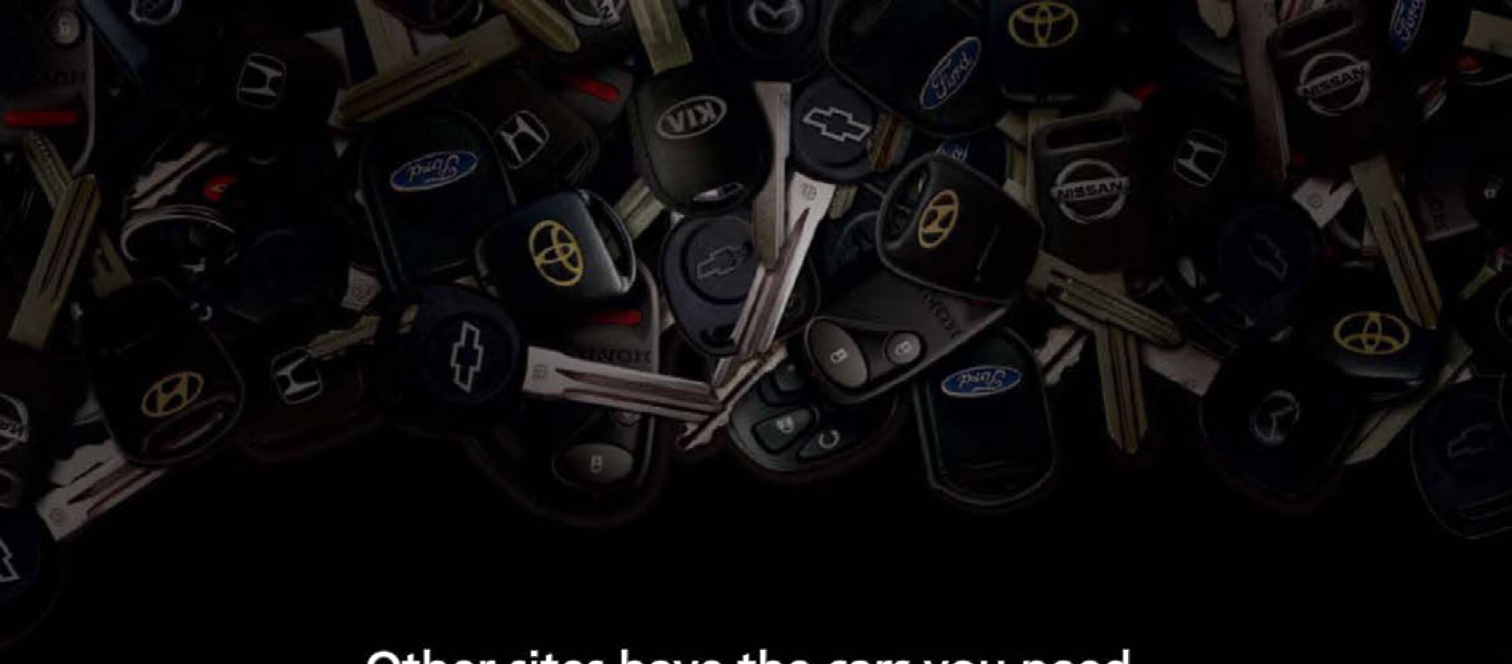


Engine/Transmission 228i 2.0L/240-hp/255-lb-ft turbo DOHC 16-valve I-4/ 8-speed automatic **M235i** 3.0L/320-hp/330-lb-ft turbo DOHC 24-valve I-6/ 8-speed automatic

Curb Weight (F/R Dist.)
228i 3,346 lb (51/49%)
M235i 3,527 lb (53/47%)

Energy Consumption, City/Hwy
228i 147/94 kW-hrs/100 mi
M235i 153/105 kW-hrs/100 mi

C02 Emissions
228i 0.71 lb/mi
M235i 0.76 lb/mi



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Ford Mustang

MOTOR TREND CAR OF THE YEAR 2015

We Like Its sharply done interior. **We Don't Like** Its loose handling.



EcoBoost

The 2015 Ford Mustang arrived for Car of the Year testing with a new engine, a new body, and an all-new independent rear suspension. The 2.3-liter direct-injection, turbocharged I-4 is all-new for the Mustang and provides more balanced performance, though its 310 hp and 320 lb-ft of torque never seemed fully available on the handling track. "I wish the EcoBoost engine was a little more raw," Evans said. "It's laggy at low RPM, but when the turbo comes on, there's no big payoff. It's just a little extra push."

The bigger (and heavier) V-8 Mustang's carryover 5.0-liter engine adds power but makes the car more difficult to control. The chassis seems to have a difficult time handling it when pushed to the limit. While many editors thought the steering was crisp and the ride generally solid, neither Mustang felt as thrilling as the ponycar competition.

However, the Mustang's new interior impressed everyone. It has a spacious front row, nicely designed IP and center stack, and comfortable seats, making it a great living space for the driver and front passenger.

"The engine-turned trim has a retro-cool look about it," Markus said. "The aircraft-inspired touches like the groundspeed indication on the speedometer and the look of the gauges is interesting." The Mustang adds a number of new features, including driver-selectable modes, blind-spot detection, and a set of track applications such as Launch mode and Line-Lock. The systems work well and add another arrow to the Mustang's quiver.

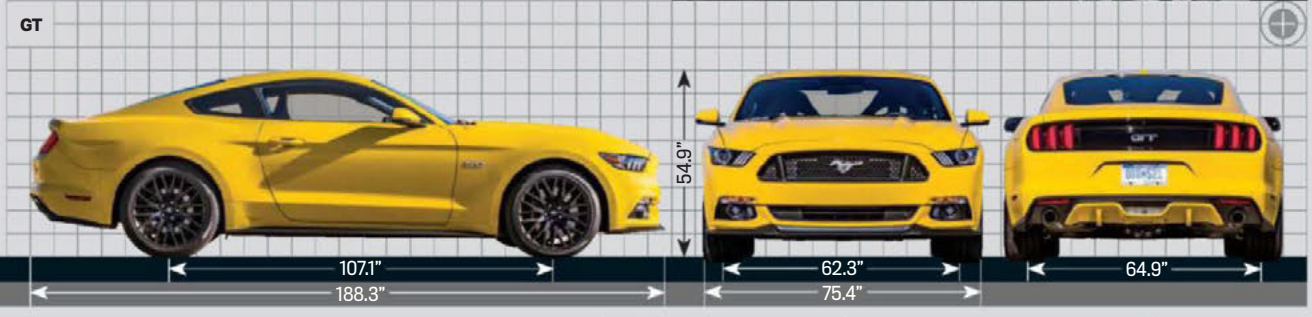
The evolutionary design advances the Mustang without causing it to lose a connection to its past. While some editors would have liked to see the new design move the Mustang in a different direction, Gale said most of the design choices work well with this car. "The rear view is very pleasing with a wider, flatter feel and a fresh handling of the surface and graphics," he said, adding that the side view remains flat.

While the Mustang did not display the performance chops to merit Car of the Year, most editors said this Mustang was the most livable yet.
Scott Burgess

2015 Ford Mustang	EcoBoost	GT
Base Price / As Tested	**$25,995** / $37,660	**$32,925** / $46,380
Power (SAE net)	**310** hp @ 5,500 rpm	**435** hp @ 6,500 rpm
Torque (SAE net)	**320** lb-ft @ 2,500 rpm	**400** lb-ft @ 4,250 rpm
Accel, 0-60 mph	**5.6** sec	**4.4** sec
Quarter Mile	**14.1** sec @ 97.8 mph	**12.8** sec @ 112.2 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	**106** ft	**107** ft
Lateral Acceleration	**0.96** g (avg)	**0.96** g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	**25.5** sec @ 0.80 g (avg)	**24.7** sec @ 0.84 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb.	**21/32/25** mpg	**15/25/19** mpg

Vehicle Layout Front-engine, RWD, 4-pass, 2-door coupe





Engine/Transmission
EcoBoost 2.3L/310-hp/320-lb-ft turbo DOHC 16-valve I-4/ 6-speed automatic
GT 5.0L/435-hp/400-lb-ft DOHC 32-valve V-8/ 6-speed manual

Curb Weight (F/R Dist.)
EcoBoost 3,658 lb (53/47%)
GT 3,814 lb (54/46%)

Energy Consumption, City/Hwy
EcoBoost 160/105 kW-hrs/100 mi
GT 225/135 kW-hrs/100 mi

CO2 Emissions
EcoBoost 0.78 lb/mi
GT 1.06 lb/mi

Lexus RC F

We Like Engine, transmission, brakes, handling. **We Don't Like** Shake 'N Bake exterior styling.



The Lexus RC is a mash-up of existing Lexus cars. The front third of the vehicle comes from the midsize GS sedan, the middle section is from the IS C convertible, and the rear third is from the IS sedan. The result is a wide track at the front, short rear overhang, and a very stiff structure. And weight. To wit, the RC F is more than 400 pounds heavier than the car it most directly competes against, the BMW M4. Sadly, Lexus couldn't provide us with an RC 350 F Sport, so we can't talk about the entire RC range. Still, we liked the RC F and its 467-horsepower, naturally aspirated V-8 well enough that we brought it along as a finalist.

Why is the RC F not Car of the Year? Because of the 4,045-pound elephant in the room, and we're not talking curb weight. We're talking design. The RC F is one of the most bafflingly bizarre-looking cars we've ever laid eyes on. That's being polite. Our design judge was even more polite. "The overall proportion and package are not at fault but are let down by a collection of details," said Gale. Kiino was more blunt: "It reminds me of an ugly dog that's cute because it's so ugly." MacKenzie summarizes, "This thing is a mess from front to rear."

That's a damn shame, because the RC F is a wonderful driver's car. Says Kiino: "A really pleasurable car to drive, and not just at break-neck speeds. Ride is surprisingly compliant, and the cabin is quiet on the highway." Should you decide to push deeper with your right foot, the RC F delivers. After smashing it around the Winding Track, Markus said, "This is how sport transmission shift logic is supposed to work!" As for the engine, MacKenzie called it "stonkingly good—the RC F breezed up to speed with a barrel-chested roar on the bowl before nuzzling the speed limiter." Markus also praised the "indefatigable" brakes and the "exceptional" steering feel.

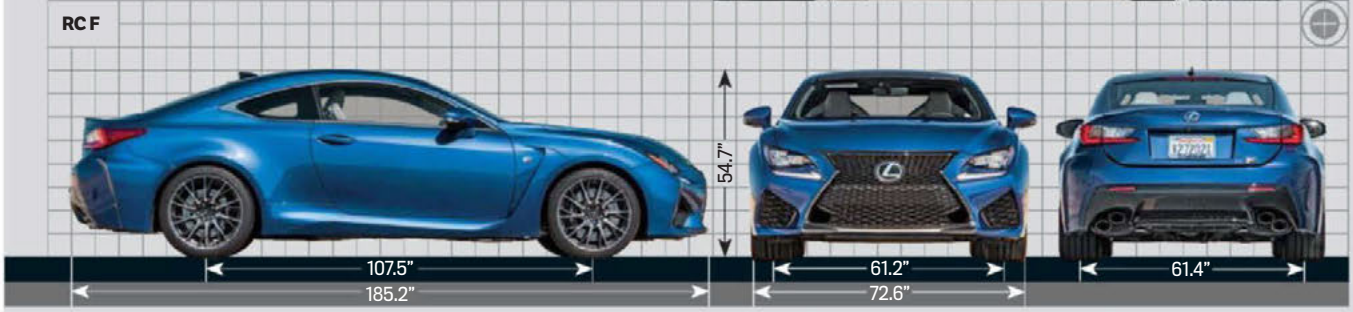
But man, those looks. Markus again: "I'm reminded of Ray Hutton's quote regarding the Fiat Multipla: 'It's like a whorehouse. You are embarrassed to be seen going in, but once inside you don't want to leave.'"

Jonny Lieberman

2015 Lexus RC F	
Base Price / As Tested	**$63,325** / $73,225
Power (SAE net)	**467** hp @ 7,100 rpm
Torque (SAE net)	**389** lb-ft @ 4,800 rpm
Accel, 0-60 mph	**4.3** sec
Quarter Mile	**12.7** sec @ 112.2 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	**107** ft
Lateral Acceleration	**0.92** g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	**24.9** sec @ 0.80 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb.	**16/25/19** mpg

Vehicle Layout Front-engine, RWD, 4-pass, 2-door coupe





Engine/Transmission 5.0L/467-hp/389-lb-ft DOHC 32-valve V-8/ 8-speed automatic

Curb Weight (F/R Dist.) 4,045 lb (54/46%)

Energy Consumption, City/Hwy 211/135 kW-hrs/100 mi

CO2 Emissions 1.02 lb/mi

It might be hard to believe, but in a four-decade lifespan, Volkswagen's Golf has only run away with our Golden Calipers once before, in 1985. Also interesting is the fact that the GTI that won our Car of the Year award 30 years ago was deemed our "domestic" COTY at a time when we still categorized imported cars into their own award. The domestic tag was because the 1985 GTI was constructed at Volkswagen's now-defunct Pennsylvania plant, which was shuttered three years later. A lot has changed in the intervening years. Volkswagen is once again producing cars in the U.S., and the Volkswagen Golf, including the GTI, is once again our Car of the Year. For 2015, the Golf was a near-unanimous choice among our judges by virtue of its strong performance in each of our six Car of the Year criteria.

Words Rory Jurnecka
Photographs Julia LaPalme

Advancement in Design

While we admit that the 2015 Golf won't make the average freeway-goer take much notice, the devil's in the details. With crisply sculpted bodywork that's nearly an inch lower, two inches longer, and a half-inch wider than its predecessor's, the new Golf looks sleeker and sportier than the car it replaces. There are no superfluous lines, no gimmicky details; this makes the Golf one



OUR CHAMPION IS A JACKRABBIT OF ALL TRADES

CAR FOR THE COURSE



BANDWIDTH No matter what you're looking for in a compact hatchback, VW has you covered, from an electric commuter to a nearly 300-hp track toy and lots in between.

of the few cars in its segment that is able to appeal visually to both younger and more mature demographics. "Exquisite execution of lines and surface," said our guest judge in design, Tom Gale. The interior is equally impressive, with refinement and attention to detail apparent everywhere—from the revamped 5.8-inch touchscreen display, to the supportive seats and clear instrumentation, to the cloth-lined door pockets normally found only in higher-end vehicles. We also appreciated classic touches such as the golf-ball-styled shift knob and available tartan upholstery in the GTI.

Efficiency

Weight reduction and improved engine efficiency have resulted in fuel economy gains for both the TSI and GTI models with their respective 1.8- and 2.0-liter turbocharged I-4 gas engines. Even more impressive, Volkswagen has also included room in the lineup for diesel and electric versions of the Golf. The Golf TDI and its 2.0-liter turbodiesel inline-four return an EPA combined rating of 36 mpg, while the e-Golf has an EPA-estimated range of 83 miles. The best part is that neither car is a penalty box to drive. What the TDI lacks in horsepower it mostly makes up for in torque. While it didn't feel quite as quick as the TSI, it was no slouch for a C-segment car.

With several electric vehicles present at this year's COTY event, the e-Golf was lauded for driving and feeling most like a "normal" car. Indeed, it's tough to distinguish the e-Golf visually from its internal-combustion counterparts, inside or out. We also enjoyed the driving experience. The chassis feels as willing and playful as the other variants, while the electric motor provides an instantaneous 199 lb-ft of torque, rocketing the e-Golf forward. Best of all, interior and cargo room appear to suffer little thanks to clever battery packaging.

Engineering Excellence

To preface, a selection of lines from editors' notebooks: "Feels so incredibly well-built." "A remarkable degree of refinement for a mainstream, C-segment car." "Light feeling chassis with tons of grip." "Rides and feels like a segment above."

The basis for these comments lies in Volkswagen's new MQB modular front-engine, front-wheel-drive vehicle architecture—a platform that will underpin dozens of new vehicles. All told, MQB is said to save around 200 pounds over the previous-generation Golf, reductions coming from such a range of places as the body (made of 80 percent high-strength steel for a 51-pound savings), to the seats (15 pounds lighter), to the air-conditioning system (6 pounds lighter). All this despite a larger body that pays dividends in cabin space, especially in



GO TIME All-new powertrains fill the Golf's engine bay, with not a single dud in the group.



TRIPLE DUTY Clever touches abound on the Golf, such as the VW badge that's also the hatch release and hides the rearview camera.

the rear seat and cargo areas.

No matter which Golf variant we jumped into, we emerged with smiles on our faces. And while each obviously catered to different priorities, they all share the same solid build quality, taut structure, and remarkable ride that make them feel like a premium vehicle in an entry-level segment. In-cabin noise was minimal in every variant, and even the sportiest Golf, the GTI, refused to beat us up over days of hammering Hyundai Proving Grounds' unforgiving special surfaces loop.

We were also impressed with the powertrains in our Golf variants—from the TDI's torquey low-end surge to the GTI's rev-happy rush, there wasn't a dud in the group. While the throws could have been a little shorter on the TDI's six-speed manual gearbox, we adored the GTI's six-speed action, which really connects driver to car. The TSI's 1.8-liter turbocharged I-4 must vie for the title of best standard engine in its segment, sharing the same EA888 series design as its GTI sibling. Moreover, its six-speed torque-converter automatic shifted quick enough to have more than one editor wondering if it were actually a snazzy twin-clutch auto.



TSI

Performance of Intended Function

Every Golf we had on hand was made for a different customer with different priorities. From eco-friendly tech lovers, to fuel misers, to canyon road carvers, to A-to-B commuters, our four variants excelled in their individual ways while still feeling similar. Better yet, each did this at a price point that belies its premium feel, a major Volkswagen brand goal.

GOLF R $37,415
292 HP

GOLF TDI $22,815
45 EPA HWY MPG

GOLF TSI $21,515
IIHS TOP SAFETY PICK+

REAL MPG
23/34/27

ELECTRIC WONDERLAND An underhood peak at the e-Golf's inner workings.

No matter which Golf variant we jumped into, we emerged with smiles on our faces.

WINNER | Car of the Year | 2015 Volkswagen Golf

2015 Volkswagen Golf	TSI	TDI	GTI	e-Golf
Base Price / As Tested	**$21,515** / $28,810	**$22,815** / $27,010	**$25,215** / $28,215	**$36,265** / $36,265
Power (SAE net)	**170** hp @ 4,500 rpm	**150** hp @ 3,500 rpm	**210** hp @ 4.500 rpm	**115** hp
Torque (SAE net)	**200** lb-ft @ 1,600 rpm	**236** lb-ft @ 1,750 rpm	**258** lb-ft @ 1,500 rpm	**199** lb-ft @ 0 rpm
Accel, 0-60 mph	**7.8** sec	**9.0** sec	**5.9** sec	**9.1** sec
Quarter Mile	**15.9** sec @ 88.3 mph	**17.0** sec @ 83.6 mph	**14.5** sec @ 98.3 mph	**16.9** sec @ 80.4 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	**117** ft	**117** ft	**107** ft	**122** ft
Lateral Acceleration	**0.86** g (avg)	**0.80** g (avg)	**0.91** g (avg)	**0.83** g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	**27.2** sec @ 0.65 g (avg)	**28.3** sec @ 0.59 g (avg)	**26.1** sec @ 0.71 g (avg)	**27.9** sec @ 0.61 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb.	**25/36/29** mpg	**30/45/36** mpg	**25/34/28** mpg	**116** mpg-e (comb)



Vehicle Layout Front-engine, FWD, 5-pass, 4-door hatchback



Engine/Transmission TSI 1.8L/170-hp/200-lb-ft turbo DOHC 16-valve I-4/6A **TDI** 2.0L/150-hp/236-lb-ft turbodiesel DOHC 16-valve I-4/6M **GTI** 2.0L/210-hp/258-lb-ft turbo DOHC 16-valve I-4/6M **e-Golf** 115-hp/199-lb-ft AC permanent-magnet electric motor/1A

Curb Weight (F/R Dist.)
TSI 3,122 lb (60/40%)
TDI 3,184 lb (61/39%)
GTI 3,101 lb (60/40%)
e-Golf 3,412 lb (55/45%)

Energy Consumption, City/Hwy
TSI 135/94 kW-hrs/100 mi
TDI 126/84 kW-hrs/100 mi
GTI 135/99 kW-hrs/100 mi
e-Golf 29 kW-hrs/100 mi (comb)

CO2 Emissions
TSI 0.67 lb/mi
TDI 0.63 lb/mi
GTI 0.68 lb/mi
e-Golf 0.00 lb/mi (at vehicle)





The 2015 Golf is a quality car, a fun car, a grown-up car.

A key point of the hatchback is practicality. Such a design maximizes available space in any vehicle, but especially so in smaller ones. Volkswagen's experience with hatchbacks has benefited the latest Golf with more cargo space than the outgoing model, according to VW, and a real rear seat that fit even our tallest testers comfortably. We'd venture to say that there's more apparent cabin space in the Golf than in some midsize sedans.

In recent months, we had the opportunity to subject two different 2015 Golf models to in-depth comparison tests. To that end, the 2015 Golf TSI won our entry-level four-door hatchback Big Test, ahead of four of its competitors, including the beloved Mazda3. And the 2015 GTI won our four-way small, sporty car shootout, which included the stout Subaru WRX.

Of course, we haven't even seen the end of the Mk7 Golf line yet. In 2015, would-be racers will be able to buy a new Golf R with all-wheel drive, a dual-clutch transmission, and nearly 300 horsepower. Luckily, we already tested a European-spec R whose 0-60 run of 4.9 seconds and average lateral acceleration of 0.97 g were reminders of this car's lofty capabilities. More interested in hauling stuff around? VW will also be launching the longer Golf SportWagen, offering 10 percent more cargo room than the outgoing Jetta SportWagen, giving it the kind of versatility that will rival that of compact crossovers. A Golf for every driver? Sure seems that way.

Safety

All 2015 Golf models come standard with six airbags, stability control, and Volkswagen's automatic post-collision braking system, which activates the brakes after a crash is detected by the airbag sensors to help minimize further damage. Of course, that may not be needed at all if buyers choose the optional Driver Assistance Package, which includes a forward-collision warning system. That system's availability, along with ratings of Good in each of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety's five crash evals (including the newly standardized small-overlap frontal test), earned it an IIHS Top Safety Pick + rating—the highest possible. The Golf hasn't been rated by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), but it is expected to earn another impressive score.



Value

With a base price of $19,815 for the standard Golf S (a limited-offer Launch Edition is $1,000 less), it's true that the Golf isn't the cheapest C-segment vehicle available in the U.S. But for that price, buyers get the kind of ride and build quality, engineering proficiency, and design details that go beyond the norm for the entry-level segment. Further, the starting prices of the other variants on hand—$22,815 for a TDI, $25,215 for a GTI, and $36,265 for an e-Golf—represent big bang for the buck. The overall look and feel of the Golf rivals premium competitors that cost thousands—even tens of thousands—more.

We found this to be true even while driving other 2015 Car of the Year contenders. Volkswagen Group probably doesn't want to hear it, but few of our editors would pay the price premium for an Audi A3 1.8 over a Golf TSI given the relatively small difference in quality and driving experience. Some would even prefer the Golf's interior design and roomy cabin to the A3's if cost were no object.

If a trend toward smaller vehicles has shown anything, it's that buyers want the same tech-laden features, the same build quality, and the same upscale design and feel of their larger cars in their smaller ones. The 2015 Volkswagen Golf is a quality car, a fun car, a grown-up car—a C-segment vehicle that can instill pride of ownership without breaking the bank. And that's why it's the 2015 *Motor Trend* Car of the Year. ■

POWERTRAIN/CHASSIS	VOLKSWAGEN GOLF TSI; TDI; GTI; e-GOLF
DRIVETRAIN LAYOUT	Front-engine, FWD
ENGINE TYPE	Turbocharged I-4, iron block/alum head; synchronous AC permanent magnet
VALVETRAIN	DOHC, 4 valves/cyl; –
DISPLACEMENT	109.7 cu in/1798cc; 120.1 cu in/1968cc; 121.1 cu in/1984cc; –
COMPRESSION RATIO	9.6:1; 16.2:1; 9.6:1; –
BATTERY TYPE	-; lithium-ion
REDLINE	6,000; 5,000; 6,000; - rpm
WEIGHT TO POWER	18.4; 21.2; 14.8; 29.7 lb/hp
TRANSMISSION	6-speed automatic; 6-speed manual; 6-speed manual; 1-speed automatic
AXLE/FINAL-DRIVE RATIO	3.87:1/2.59:1; 3.45:1(1,2,3,4); 2.76:1 (5,6,R)/1.99:1; 3.24:1 (1,2,3,4); 2.62:1 (5,6, R)/2.38:1; 3.61:1/9.75:1
SUSPENSION, FRONT; REAR	Struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar; multi-link, coil springs, anti-roll bar
STEERING RATIO	13.6:1; 13.6:1; 9.5:1-14.1:1; 13.6:1
TURNS LOCK-TO-LOCK	2.7; 2.8; 2.2; 2.8
BRAKES, F;R	11.3-in vented disc; 10.7-in disc, ABS; 11.3-in vented disc; 10.0-in disc, ABS; 12.3-in vented disc; 10.7-in disc, ABS; 11.3-in vented disc; 10.7-in disc, ABS
WHEELS	7.5 x 18-in, cast aluminum; 7.0 x 17-in, cast aluminum; 7.5 x 18-in, cast aluminum; 6.5 x 16-in, cast aluminum
TIRES	225/40R18 92H M+S Pirelli P Zero Nero All Season; 225/45R17 91H M+S Continental ContiProContact; 225/40R18 92Y Bridgestone Potenza S001; 205/55R16 91H M+S Continental ProContact TX
DIMENSIONS	
TURNING CIRCLE	35.8 ft
WEIGHT DIST., F/R	60/40%; 61/39%; 60/40%; 55/45%
SEATING CAPACITY	5
HEADROOM, F/R	38.4/38.1 in
LEGROOM, F/R	41.2/35.6 in
SHOULDER ROOM, F/R	55.9/53.9 in
CARGO VOLUME BEH F/R	22.8/52.7 cu ft
TEST DATA	
ACCELERATION TO MPH	
0-30	2.7; 3.3; 2.3; 2.8 sec
0-40	4.1; 4.7; 3.5; 4.3
0-50	5.7; 6.9; 4.6; 6.4
0-60	7.8; 9.0; 5.9; 9.1
0-70	10.1; 12.1; 7.8; 12.5
0-80	12.9; 15.5; 9.7; 16.8
0-90	16.6; 19.9; 11.9; -
0-100	20.9; -; 15.0; -
PASSING, 45-65 MPH	4.1; 4.5; 2.7; 5.4
TOP-GEAR REVS @ 60 MPH	1,800 rpm; 1,650 rpm; 2,050 rpm; 8,200 rpm
CONSUMER INFO	
STABILITY/TRACTION CONTROL	Yes/yes
AIRBAGS	Dual front, front side, f/r curtain
BASIC WARRANTY	3 yrs/36,000 miles
POWERTRAIN WARRANTY	5 yrs/60,000 miles
ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE	3 yrs/36,000 miles
FUEL CAPACITY	13.2 gal; 0.7 gallon equivalent (24.2 kW-hr)
RECOMMENDED FUEL	Unleaded regular; diesel; unleaded premium; 220-volt electricity, 110-volt electricity

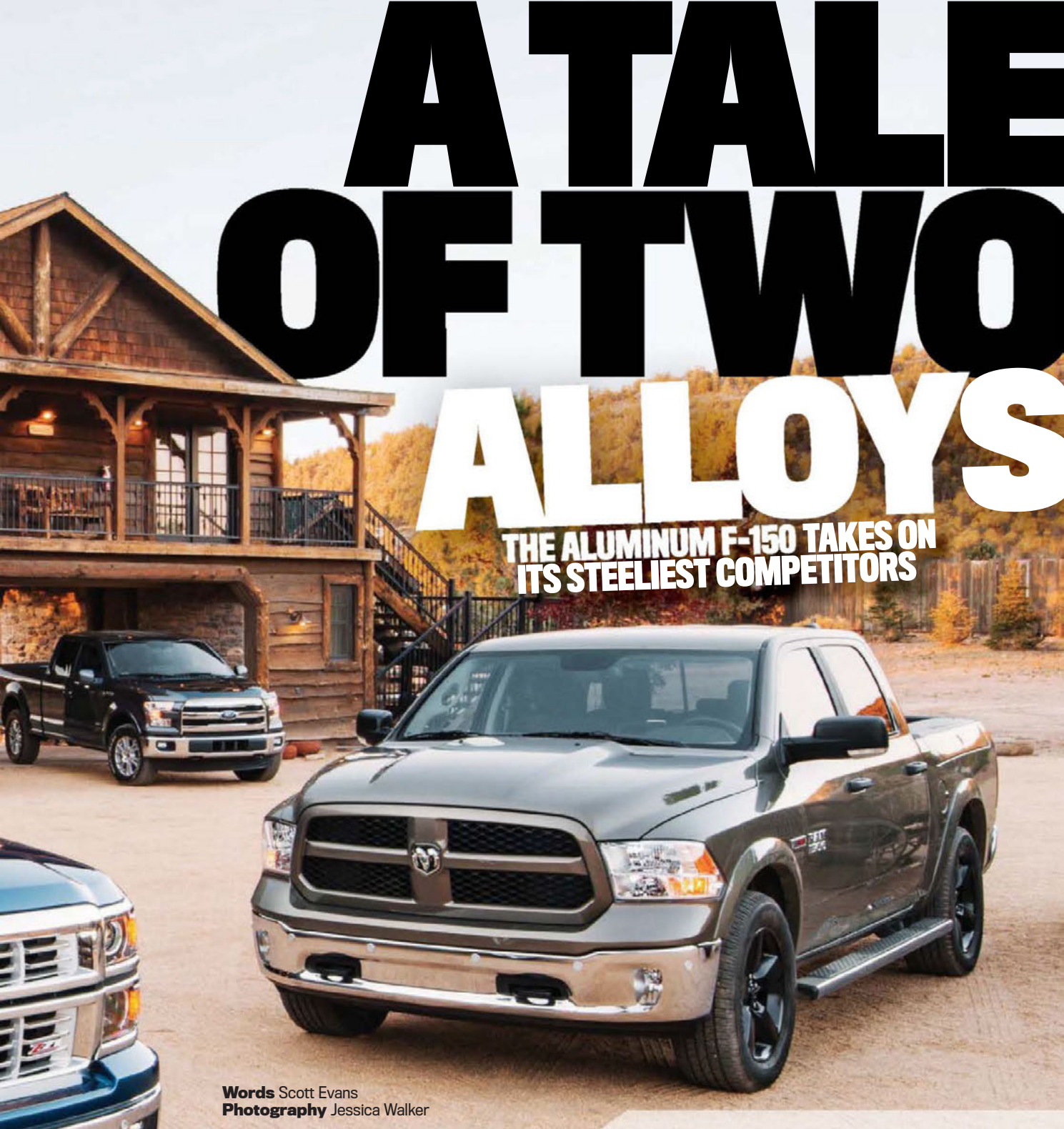
COMPARISON

Ford F-150 Lariat 4x4 VS. **RAM 1500 Outdoorsman EcoDiesel 4x4**
VS. **Chevrolet Silverado 1500 LTZ Z71**



A TALE OF TWO ALLOYS

THE ALUMINUM F-150 TAKES ON ITS STEELIEST COMPETITORS



Words Scott Evans
Photography Jessica Walker

Pickup trucks are so ubiquitous, so common on our roadways that we tend to take them for granted, but the fact is America loves trucks. Combined, Chevrolet, Ford, and Ram sold 1.6 million of them last year, and sales are up. That's mind-boggling to some, but it illustrates just how important these vehicles are to the market, their builders, and their buyers.

It also illustrates why the three big players have each launched an all-new model within the past three years, each truck stuffed with significant updates based on volumes of customer research, and we've got their strongest all-around models assembled for this test. From Chevrolet, the Silverado 1500 LTZ with a 5.3-liter EcoTec3 V-8. From Ford, the F-150 Lariat with a 2.7-liter twin-turbo EcoBoost V-6. From Ram, the 1500 Outdoorsman with a 3.0-liter turbocharged EcoDiesel V-6.

From the outset, you can see a small problem: The only F-150 with the 2.7-liter EcoBoost available for our test was this Lariat SuperCab, a mid-grade model roughly $7,000 cheaper as tested than the nearly top-trim Ram and Silverado. Thankfully, we also had an F-150 3.5-liter EcoBoost Platinum SuperCrew at the office to compare features and interior space. Additionally, a comparably equipped F-150 would run about $54,000, or you could

HEAVY WEIGHTS
Aluminum or not, the lightest truck in this group still weighs more than 4900 pounds (Ford). The heaviest? Ram at nearly 6000.

Location: Jackrabbit Ranch, Big Bear City, CA

strip down the Ram or Silverado to meet the F-150's price with similar content.

Despite what truck advertising would have you think, customer research is consistent across the board. Most light-duty trucks, for example, drive around empty most of the time. With that in mind, we started with a drive around town and down the freeway with empty trucks.

As the test data at the end of the story show, the F-150 is a screamer. The 2.7-liter EcoBoost engine feels wildly more powerful than its official ratings suggest, so much so that our testing director got it and the 3.5-liter EcoBoost truck mixed up at the track. When we took it up to the mountains, the turbochargers made short work of the altitude, though the six-speed transmission tended to hunt among the upper gears as it went up and down hills and around tight corners. Beyond that, we were less impressed. The steering is the lightest of the three and rather vague. The F-150 rides well and is quiet inside, but the front end feels floaty on the freeway.





The biggest surprise was the disparity between the Silverado's test data and its real-world performance. On the test track, the Silverado was nearly as quick as the F-150. On the street, you'd never know. The objectively slower Ram felt quicker around town than the Silverado. The combination of incredibly lethargic throttle response and a transmission that seems to always be in sixth gear made the Silverado feel the slowest by a country mile unless you floored it. Up in the mountains, these problems were only exaggerated. Otherwise, the Chevy is very quiet inside, the ride is soft and a bit floaty, and all the responses are a bit dull. The test numbers say it's the quickest around a corner, but you wouldn't know it from inside.

The Ram was also a surprise—but a good one. The EcoDiesel's torque comes on quickly and makes the truck feel quicker than it is. Part of that is thanks to its exclusive eight-speed automatic transmission, which we



BLOCK PARTY The giant, customizable display in the gauges is chock-full of features. The only console shifter in the group seemed like a waste of potential storage space.



Comparably equipped, these trucks are essentially all the same price: above $53,000.

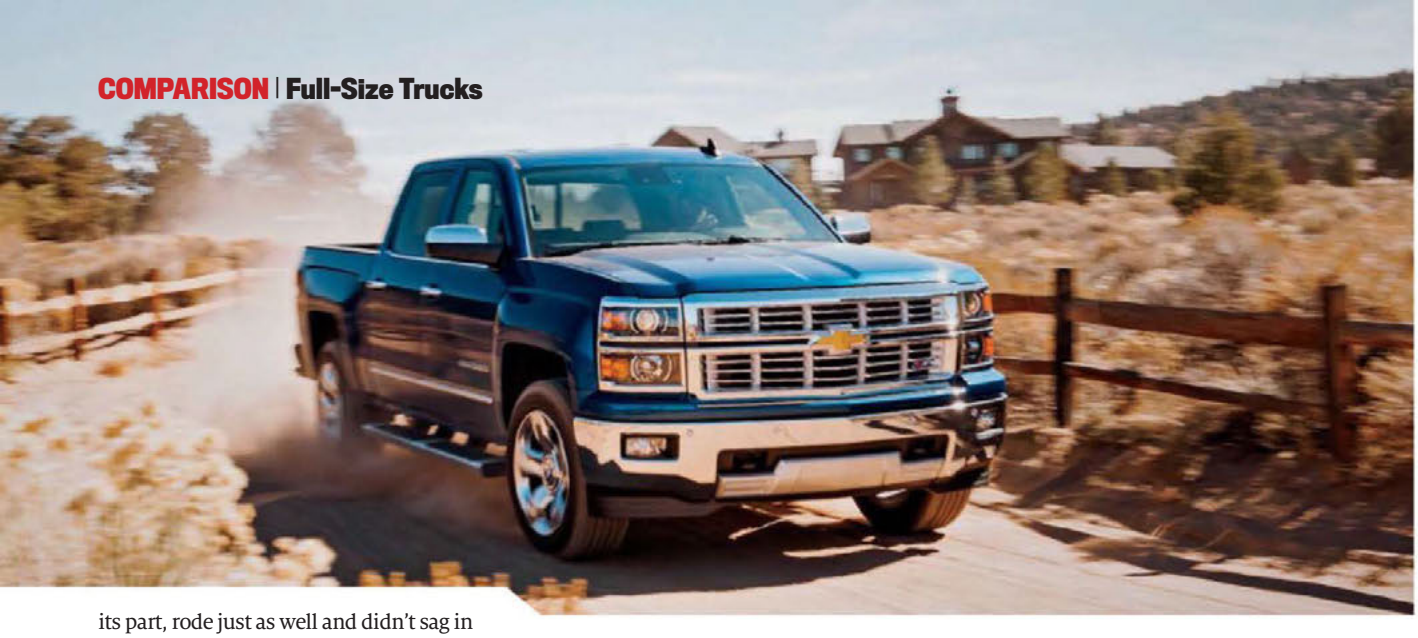


agreed was the best here by far. Up in the mountains, this winning team never noticed the altitude or the twisty road. It was always in the right gear with ample power. The Ram's class-exclusive, optional air suspension rode the best, and the truck felt confident and responsive in turns, though it could use a quicker steering rack.

Next up was hauling. Per the research, the typical light-duty truck owner hauls about 1,000 pounds on average, so we dropped 1,000 pounds in each truck and hit the road. The all-powerful Ford didn't seem to notice the weight at all when accelerating, and the Ram seemed only vaguely aware of the load. The Chevy felt like it was working harder, and every move required more throttle pedal than before. The Chevy also didn't ride any better or worse, but its floaty, under-controlled body motions were exaggerated slightly. The Ford's ride was less affected, though we noticed more of the bumps in the road. The Ram, for



THE LOOK Editors preferred the look, layout, and quality of the Ram's interior. Its entertainment and information system is the friendliest to use.



its part, rode just as well and didn't sag in the rear at all, thanks to its load-leveling air suspension.

With flat land hauling impressions in the bag, we headed out to the Davis Dam grade. The combination of altitude, payload, and a continuous 6-percent grade allowed us to observe how the powertrains reacted to a worst-case scenario we called "the frustration test." That is, trying to pass uphill while weighed down. Once again, the Ford felt unencumbered and skipped up the hill as if the weight wasn't there. The Chevy felt seriously heavy, and the spry-downshifting Ram felt quicker than its slowest-of-all results suggested.



Leaving the grade behind, we dumped our payload and scrounged up a trailer. While maximum trailering weight has become the same sort of ego-measuring contest as horsepower, the reality is that 60 percent of light-duty truck owners tow less than once a month. When they do, they tow 7,000-8,000 pounds on average, so we hitched up a 7,000-pound trailer and got to work.

First, we did a bit of acceleration testing to replicate those hairy freeway on-ramp moments. The Ford still felt and was the quickest. The Chevy felt the slowest and most labored, but it was actually the second quickest; the Ram felt quicker than the Chevy even though it wasn't. To the Chevy's credit, though, its power delivery was the most linear. Both the Ford and Ram suffered from turbo lag off the line, the Ford especially so.

A bit of driving revealed more about each truck's towing characteristics. Neither the Ford nor the Ram seemed bothered by the trailer when cornering. The Chevy, though, rolled a bit in the curves. Both the Chevy and Ford suffered from a firmer, bouncier ride with the trailer hooked up, but the Ram's air suspension had it riding about the same as it does without a trailer. All three trucks felt confident and composed when braking hard with the trailer attached.

Reversing, the Chevy's high beltline made seeing out slightly harder than in the other two, and it felt like the largest truck here, so



MOBILE OFFICE The Chevy counts six USB ports, four 12V ports, an aux input, an SD card reader, a 110V outlet, and a 4G Wi-Fi hot spot.

FOR THE **OUTPERFORMER** IN EVERY DRIVER





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CAN YOU TELL
It's aluminum?

We have never seen a happy-looking truck owner after a $130 fill-up.

backing up was a little challenging but easy enough. The Ford was easier to see out of and responded better, thanks in part to its power and quick steering, but its tall, skinny side mirrors kept losing the parking space. The Ram shone brightest with its ample outward visibility, abundant low RPM torque, and wide side mirrors that never lost the parking space.

Driving done, it was time to look at other aspects of the trucks. Getting into each bed was a wildly different experience. While Ford's tailgate step makes climbing into and out of the bed the easiest, it has some drawbacks. If the tailgate is up or blocked, you're out of luck. It also requires several steps to set up and stow. Chevy's Cornerstep bumper, by contrast, is a beautifully simple solution. The steps in the rear bumper ends sit only 0.5 inch higher than Ford's step but require no setup and work whether the tailgate is up, down, or blocked. Their only drawback is that they require more balance and dexterity to use. Ram has no step. The best it can do is lower itself 1.75 inches with its air suspension

TIED DOWN **All three trucks feature a tie-down system in the bed, and each is an exercise in frustration. The Ram's is the most adjustable, and the Ford's works fine if you know the trick.**

set to Entry/Exit height (which can be done with the keyfob), leaving it 11 inches higher than either the Ford or Chevy solutions.

Moving inside the trucks, we liked the aesthetics and materials of the Ram's interior the best. Its seats are the most comfortable and supportive, its Uconnect infotainment system is the most intuitive to use, it's got tons of storage space, and we like the rotary gear selector. The Chevy earned praise for its bank of USB ports, 12V power points, and 110V plug. We liked the Ford's massive, customizable display screen in the instrument cluster, but the only console shifter in the group ate up a lot of center console space, and what power and USB ports the Ford had were hidden down in a cubby we could barely get our fingers in.

Each of these trucks also carries a laundry list of available features to make your life easier. The Chevy's on-board 4G LTE wireless hot spot turns it into a mobile office, though the Ram does offer a slower 3G hot spot. The Ram's lauded air suspension and super-handy Ram Box bed storage system were staff favorites. The Ford's 360-degree camera ought to be standard on all vehicles this size, and its enormous sunroof is impressive. In the end, the features were so diverse that we called it a draw.

Finally, we measured fuel economy. Some of you will no doubt say it doesn't matter, that trucks get bad fuel economy and buyers accept it. To that we respond that we have never seen truck owners looking happy after pumping $130 of gas or diesel into their trucks.

Looming perhaps the largest in this category is the all-new F-150. Not only has Ford developed a tiny 2.7-liter twin-turbo V-6 designed to simultaneously provide V-8 power and V-6 fuel economy, but it's also made the truck's body and cab out of aluminum to significantly reduce weight. Unfortunately, it's Eco OR Boost, not both. If you drive like there's a Fabergé egg under the gas pedal, you'll get decent fuel economy, but dip into the power at

3RD 2ND 1ST

Only 5 percent of light-duty truck owners go off-road once or more per month.

all and you'll get V-8 fuel economy to match your V-8 power. As of this writing, Ford had not announced EPA estimates for the new F-150, but we put it through our Real MPG testing and saw 17 mpg city, 22 mpg highway, and 19 mpg combined. We also did a far less scientific test while the trucks were loaded—divided the miles driven by the gallons pumped. In that test, the F-150 returned just under 17 mpg.

Recognizing that many truck buyers prefer V-8s regardless of power ratings, Chevy redesigned its V-8 and added a cylinder deactivation system that turns it into a 2.7-liter V-4 under light loads. It's a neat trick, but it's not as effective as Ford's solution. The Chevy is EPA-rated at 16 mpg city, 22 mpg highway, and 18 mpg combined. In our Real MPG testing, it returned a disappointing 13/19/15. In our payload fuel economy test, though, it came within striking distance of the Ford at just over 16 mpg observed.

Ram took its own gamble: a six-cylinder turbodiesel engine. The Ram EcoDiesel is EPA-rated at 19 mpg city, 27 mpg highway, and 22 mpg combined. In our Real MPG testing, it performed better than advertised, returning 20/28/23. Moreover, in our payload fuel economy test, it returned an observed 23 mpg. The Ram's combined Real MPG is 21 percent better than the F-150's, covering the current 18 percent national price premium of diesel, though paying off the EcoDiesel's $4,000 option price would require time or a dramatic change in the fuel-price landscape.

(If you're wondering why we didn't take these trucks any farther off pavement than a lightly maintained dirt road, the answer is again in the data. Only 5 percent of light-duty truck owners take their trucks off-road once or more per month.)

After more than a week of driving and testing, it was inescapably clear how fiercely competitive this class is. All three are good trucks that will serve their deeply loyal customers well, but by the end, the Chevrolet Silverado is simply a step behind the Ford F-150 and Ram 1500 in every regard. The race was much tighter between the F-150 and the Ram, but in the end, questions about real-world fuel economy benefits and crash-repair costs of Ford's aluminum play weighed against it, while the Ram's combination of exclusive features, towing and hauling abilities, driving experience, and unimpeachable fuel economy put it on top. ■



INGENUITY — INSIDE & OUT

CHEVROLET MALIBU

It was one of many mandates posed to the engineers and designers working on the Chevrolet Malibu: How can we make the driver's life easier? The beautiful styling is apparent, but you have to experience the cutting-edge technology like available Siri Eyes Free with Text to Talk.[1] It allows the driver to have spoken messages turned into texts, which can then be sent with a verbal command. Or incoming text messages can be read aloud, all without ever picking up the phone. These are just some of the features that deliver an inviting and enjoyable ride. To learn what we've done under the hood and beyond — read on.

***AND WHEN YOU DO,** you'll find some of the same engine technology that Chevrolet racers used to win the 2013 IndyCar Manufacturers' Championship.*

1 *Requires available Chevrolet MyLink and compatible iPhone running iOS 6 or later.*

DRIVER-CENTRIC ENGINEERING:

POWER & EFFICIENCY

The latest advancements in fuel-saving, power-boosting and suspension technologies work in harmony. The 2.5L engine offers an EPA-estimated 25 MPG city/36 hwy. The available 2.0L Turbo offers an impressive 295 lb.-ft. of torque.

2.0L Turbo

POWER BOOSTER

The available turbocharged ECOTEC® 2.0-liter, like the 2.5-liter engine, also has double overhead camshafts and continuously Variable Valve Timing. The 2.0-liter has a turbocharger that helps generate 259 horsepower and a best-in-class 295 lb.-ft. of torque that's available at engine speeds as low as 3000 rpm.

lb-ft.

Malibu 2.0L	*295 torque*
Audi A6 2.0L	*258 torque*
BMW 528i	*260 torque*
Porsche Cayman	*213 torque*



2.0L Turbo

PERFECTED POWER

In an engine's combustion cycle, timing is everything. The available ECOTEC 2.0-liter turbocharged engine has nitrided intake valves. The sodium-filled stems of the exhaust valves enhance heat transfer, maintaining a lower, more uniform valve temperature, reducing valve guide wear and improving valve seat wear.

6.0 SECONDS **0-60**

2.0L Turbo & 2.5L Engine

COOLER, CONDUCIVE, QUICKER

Direct injection helps reduce cold-start emissions and allows for a higher compression ratio. Direct injection helps cool the overall intake process, allowing for higher boost from the ECOTEC 2.0-liter engine's turbocharger.

COLD-START EMISSIONS

2.5L Engine

SEAMLESS OPERATION

Intake Valve Lift Control technology enables variable intake valve lift, duration and timing over a wide range of engine operation. "Intake Valve Lift Control works so seamlessly, drivers aren't likely to notice it at all," said Mike Katerberg, Chevrolet global chief engineer for ECOTEC engines. "What they will notice is a fuel savings of up to one mile per gallon, offering an EPA-estimated 25 city/36 highway."

25 MPG CITY | **36** MPG HWY

Intelligent stop/start technology, Intake Valve Lift Control and a 6T45 transmission all contribute to the 2.5-liter's EPA-estimated fuel economy.



2.5L Engine

INTELLIGENT STOP/START TECHNOLOGY

Under certain conditions, the engine turns off at a stop and seamlessly starts again as soon as you lift your foot off the brake. The intelligent stop/start technology – along with other advancements such as Direct Injection and Variable Valve Timing – can increase city mileage by more than 10 percent for an EPA-estimated 25 MPG city. The stop/start technology uses a reinforced Absorbent Glass Mat (AGM) starting battery. There's a beefed-up tandem-solenoid starter motor and even an auxiliary battery located in the rear of the car – plus an electric hydraulic pump keeps fluid circulating through the transmission to make sure it's always pressured and primed.

ENGINE ENGAGED

As soon as the brake is released, the engine engages, virtually in an instant.

2.0L Turbo

SPECIALLY TUNED SUSPENSION

The fortified chassis includes a specially tuned suspension, as well as a revised brake booster that enhances pedal feel. The 2.0-liter turbocharged Malibu turns and stops like a performance car too.

FRONT STRUTS WITH **REBOUND SPRINGS**

CHEVROLET

THE QUICKEST SEDAN IN THE WORLD



INSANE, DEFINED

1. CANNOT DISTINGUISH FANTASY FROM REALITY; SUBJECT TO UNCONTROLLABLE IMPULSIVE BEHAVIOR **2.** MENTALLY DERANGED **3.** TESLA MODEL S P85D

"In the options selection, you'll be able to choose [between] three settings: Normal. Sport. And Insane." Elon Musk glanced around and grinned.

"Yeah, it will actually say 'In-sane.'"

Musk chortled, along with the 2,000-strong crowd eating out of the palm of his hand. Although Wall Street analysts were soured by his Los Angeles presentation of the Dual Motor Tesla Model S P85D and the mysteriously tweeted "something else" (Musk's personal wealth dropped $500 million by the next morning), all we can say is that the Wall Street suits haven't ridden in the Model S P85D. And best they don't if they want to keep their Brooks Brothers slacks dry, because we've just tested it, and as insane goes, it makes Charlie Manson look like Charlie Rose.

How crazy? Musk: "Our goal was to match one of the fastest cars ever made: the McLaren F1." Somewhere in England, Gordon Murray's porcupine eyebrows have just elevated three inches. Can the F1 designer's fabled carbon-fiber, 627-hp, Ferrari-humbling masterpiece actually be paced to 60 mph by a five-seat sedan with a trunk sized for a Home Depot haul?

Ask the man who's owned both. In 2007, as the revelry wore down after Tesla's original (now trademark) half rock concert/half car introduction for the Roadster at the Burbank airport, I was walking back to my car only to find, parked out front, an F1. I stopped. What luck. I happened to be looking for an F1 for a project, and although I never do this sort of thing, I put my card under its windshield



INNER BEAUTY
The P85D's interior receives revamped front and rear seats that are better-looking, as well as more comfortable and laterally supportive. (Note the bolsters for each of the three rear seats.) Also redesigned are the steering column stalks–including the Autopilot control–which are now more conventionally stacked.

Words Kim Reynolds
Photography Michael Shaffer

GET FRUNKY Despite the presence of the additional front motor, there's still usable room in the Model S Dual Motor's "frunk."



The quickest-accelerating sedan in the world isn't German anymore.

wiper. Later I realized it was Musk's. Yeah, he's already familiar with this comparison.

Twenty-two years ago, the McLaren F1's time of 3.2 seconds to 60 mph was the technological redline of what a mad genius Grand Prix designer could conjure from a road car. I tested one back in the day, and although it was at a closed airstrip encircled by acres of table-flat run-off room, it was among the most shattering few seconds of my life. One moment everything was still; the next, the cabin had exploded in a maniacal machine racket. The tach needle swept clockwise, the clutch pedal fought my left foot's stabs, the shifter pinballed through its detents, the V-12 engine charged through its revs again, my right foot feared staying planted but did anyway, everything shook, and I just hung the hell on as the world melted into a smear. Exhale. Launch one of Musk's Falcon 9 rockets horizontally, and you'll get the idea.

But scrambling to the same 60 mph time in the P85D bears no resemblance to that at all. With one transmission gear and no head-bobbing shifts, it's instead a rail-gun rush down a quarter-mile of asphalt bowling lane. Nothing in the drivetrain reciprocates; every part spins. There's no exhaust smell; the fuel is invisible. The torque impacts your body with the violence of facing the wrong way on the train tracks when the whistle blows. Within the first degree of its first revolution, 100 percent of the motors' combined 687 lb-ft slams the sense out of you. A rising-pitch ghost siren augers into your ears as you're not so much accelerating as pneumatically suctioned into the future. You were there. Now you're here.

The wormhole between the two is courtesy of a second motor on the front axle. At 221 hp, it's smaller than the P85+'s existing 470-hp rear machine (total: 691), and for the non-Performance 60- and 85-kW-hr Dual Motor Model S, it'll be the rear motor, too. Lift the front trunk's lid (the frunk, they call it), and you're struck by how much all of this was anticipated back when the Model S was penned. What was a recessed cavity near the firewall becomes the new forward engine room with enough left to swallow a duffle bag and retain its terrific 5-star frontal crash performance. Equal-length front halfshafts thread through new branched chassis rails and hub uprights—and that's about it.

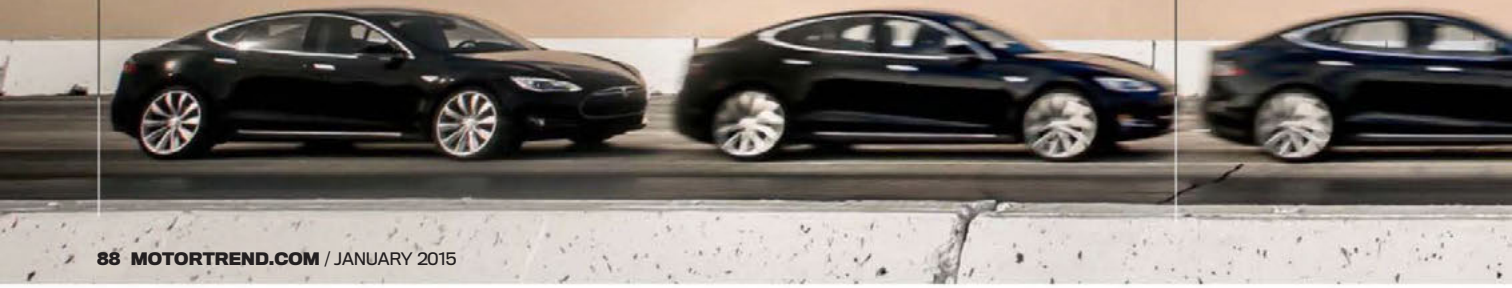
Replacing the now-discontinued P85+ as the apex Model S, the P85 Dual Motor gains 197 pounds, tipping the car's weight distribution from 47/53 (f/r) to 51/49. Anti-roll bars and shock valving are suitably thicker and firmer, but the Michelin Pilot Sport PS2 tires are the same, as is the car's 0.91 g of lateral grip. However, around our quirk-exposing figure-eight course, the D's handling wasn't Novocained by the added nose heft (as you'd expect), nor was its steering garbled by torque-steer cross-talk (as you'd expect); instead, all four tires now want to be in on the traction action. Feathering the accelerator (or rather, the accelerator pedal's potentiometer) now rotates—and also bends—the car's trajectory via regen brake drag that instantly reallocates between both axles (no longer limited to the rear). Essentially, the two motors' email-instant reflexes mean the stability control system is the drivetrain itself—and vice versa—not a Band-Aided layer of throttle- and brake-mitigating technologies overlaid on a big-inertia crankshaft and flailing pistons accustomed to Pony Express reaction times.

Consequently, the easiest way to flatten your retinas at a dragstrip isn't by just stomping on the right pedal. Instead, you draw your foot back and kick the living hell

0 DUAL MOTOR MAYHEM

The P85D accelerates like nothing else we've tested. With electric-fast reactions, its traction control matches wheel torque to available road grip to produce the launch of the gods.

24 MPH
0.83 SEC



EYE ON THE ROAD

about 20 modifications to the car per week. Not software, mind you, but actual hard parts. Per week. Adding the Dual Motor to either the 60- or 85-kW-hr cars tabulates to $4,000; it's $11,100 in frosting to a P85 (including the high-power rear motor).

From a quarterly report standpoint, the across-the-range availability of an all-wheel-drive option will assuredly boost Model S' Slippery State sales, and—duh—it was going to be central to the upcoming Model X anyway. But the world's preeminent automotive showman also knows there's no better way to stir imaginations among Tesla fence-sitters—and churn up heartburn in Bavarians—than by conjuring a hulking, pacing alpha male version of the Model S like this. How will the psychological landscape among the One Percenter Mercedes-Benz AMG, Audi RS, and BMW M crowd be recast if, when a Tesla Model S P85D rolls up at a light, it's game over, guys? Brace yourself, Teutonic Status Quo, because the quick-est-accelerating sedan in the world isn't German anymore. It's from California. As they say in Palo Alto: □□□□ □□□□□□□□□□! ■

out of it. (I'm serious.) Your foot's flying start at the pedal means the potentiometer opens the battery's electron floodgate that much sooner, and without the teeniest tire chirp, the P85D accelerates at the highest rate the road's mu (its coefficient of friction) allows. It's surreally efficient. And it's so fast off the line that the slower-sampling rate of our two high-frequency GPS data loggers was actually missing some of the action; within the first 1/20th of a sec (not even the "O" in "One Mississippi") the car was already going 0.7 mph. To 30 mph the P85D would be four feet ahead of the fastest-accelerating sedan we've tested, the Audi RS 7, a gap that holds to 60 when the Tesla punches the clock at 3.1 seconds, a tenth quicker than the Audi (as well as the McLaren F1's accepted time—all of these after subtracting the customary 1-foot rollout). Both cars arrive at the quarter in 11.6 seconds, with the Audi starting to show its higher-speed chops. (The P85D tops out at 155, the RS 7, 174 mph.) Great for the Autobahn, irrelevant in America.

When you're not doing a hole-shot, the dual motor setup can offer slightly better overall range (about 4 percent better for non-Performance versions, 3.5 percent less for the P85D) by mixing and matching the twin motors' slightly different power curves. It also might better distribute the tire wear, as its regen is now biased toward the front instead of the aft rubber, which worked over-time in the rear-drive cars.

Meanwhile, the Model S has undergone a quiet mid-cycle refreshing with better standard seats, terrific-looking and highly bolstered front and rear performance seats in the P85D (even in the back!), better whiplash protection, revised (and more conventional) steering column stalks, wider-opening rear doors, a self-closing charge port door, and bigger sunvisors. Everything's better. During a chat with Musk at the P85D's introduction, he mentioned that on average, Tesla implements

	$105,670
	$120,170
	Front & rear motor, AWD, 5-pass, 4-door sedan
	AC induction, 221 hp/244 lb-ft front; 470 hp/443 ft-lb rear (691-hp/687-lb-ft comb)
	1-speed automatic
	4,830 lb (51/49%)
	116.5 in
	196.0 x 77.3 x 56.5 in
	3.1 sec
	11.6 sec @ 115.2 mph
	113 ft
	0.91 g (avg)
	25.0 sec @ 0.77 g (avg)
	85/87/86 mpg-e (*MT* est)
	40/39 kW-hrs/100 mi (*MT* est)
	0.00 lb/mile (at vehicle)

33 MPH
1.2 SEC

39 MPH
1.6 SEC

45 MPH
1.9 SEC

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BRAKES

SUSPENSION



Words Benson Kong
Photography Robin Trajano





Why do people drive midsize pickup trucks? Per a recent Maritz market research study polling new vehicle customers, it's certainly not to go bombing down rutted trails (only 7 percent of respondents off-road once a month or more frequently) or for their towing ability (67 percent don't tow anything). So we casually asked friends and acquaintances with midsize pickups: Why?

The answers came down to: "I like sitting up high," "I like the size," "I want to carry something big once a year," or most simply, "I like it." For many, trucks are day-to-day transportation that just so happens to have a bed astern. With this in mind, we compared the 2015 Chevy Colorado Z71 to the 2015 Toyota Tacoma TRD Pro and 2015 Nissan Frontier Pro-4X. (For more on the third-place finishing Nissan, visit motortrend.com.) For help, I enlisted testing director—and supplier of 880 pounds of sand—Kim Reynolds and associate online editor Jason Udy.

The first test was to put that sand to work in assessing ride quality with the trucks laden and unladen. Traditionally, pickups don't ride as harshly with a sizable load onboard. That truism was spot-on with the Tacoma, which objectively produced 9.2 percent less average vertical g at the driver's seat (less signifies better ride control) and didn't pitch and bounce as much with the sandbags in its smooth-texture, fiber-reinforced Sheet-Molded Composite inner bed.

Out on the road without the sand, the Toyota felt wobbly. Commented Reynolds, "Those tires seem to make it feel very balloon-y—exhibits slight gyrations, which I don't like at all," before conceding, "It seems way more oriented for off-roading; the exposed suspension bits are a visual telltale." It's likely that the combination of the TRD Pro's BFGoodrich All-Terrain T/A KO tires and its off-road specialized suspension (longer-travel Bilstein shock absorbers, softer front springs, 1.75-inch higher front ride height over a typical Tacoma) generates the on-road floatiness. But park the two trucks next to each other, and you'll immediately realize which you'd want to tackle tough, remote terrain.

Apparently, Chevy didn't get the ride-quality memo. Our test equipment detected a meager 2.4 percent more average vertical g with the sandbags tossed into the also off-road-themed Colorado Z71, plus it rode more pleasantly than the Toyota whether it was laden or unladen. Perhaps the greater payload capacity (1,489 pounds to the Tacoma's 1,143) helped the truck maintain more consistent performance. Nevertheless, Udy asserted the truck has the "best handling feel" with its



OFF SIGHTS Off-roaders won't need the Colorado's $745 3-inch assist steps. Its lower air dam is said to be easily removed.



For many people, trucks are day-to-day transportation that just so happens to have a bed astern.

cab-isolating ride. Unloaded for unloaded, the Colorado was 29.5 percent better controlled than the Tacoma; both loaded, it still retained a 14.8-percent advantage.

Reynolds on the Colorado: "Its ride is more car-like than truck-like. Full-size trucks can be quite ponderous. Its smaller-than-full size results in a dramatic improvement in nimbleness." Indeed, a more compact footprint is a major reason why today's enormous 1500-class truck hasn't completely taken over the pickup segment despite few midsize offerings. Many consumers can't justify or don't want the mass of a larger Silverado 1500 or Tundra. Reynolds remembers when Ford Rancheros and Chevy El Caminos were acceptable truck alternatives. They had the obligatory bed for the occasional utility run, and you could drive them without worrying about inadvertently encroaching on other street lanes or not being able to find parking.

Soon we were conducting our own parallel-parking trials. Low-effort electric power steering, minimal B- and C-pillar intrusion, and a lovely backup camera display on the 8-inch touchscreen that comes standard on Z71 models made the Colorado's parking job painless. The Tacoma's rearward display appears on a 6.1-inch color screen, and the truck's outward visibility isn't bad. A few things threw me off, though. The taller height made it harder to gauge bumper-to-bumper distance, the hydraulically assisted power steering weighting suddenly became heavy as the steering wheel passed true center, and the short-stroke brake pedal meant I had to be mindful of how much foot pressure I was holding. If I came off the sensitive brakes even a smidge, the truck lunged forward or backward, almost too quickly.

Finally, we drove around like any commuter would, noting the trucks' characteristics and idiosyncrasies. The Toyota was already in a bit of a hole, and the jabs kept coming. "The engine note sounds as if it has half the cylinders it actually has," Reynolds observed. Udy declared of the Tacoma's powertrain: "Great low-end torque. Loud exhaust, didn't like to rev, and sounded slightly strained." Its interior is measurably noisier than the Colorado at a 60-mph cruise, 27.1 sones to the Chevy's 24.7.

RIGHT TOOL
The Tacoma has the TRD Pro line's top approach angle at 37.8 degrees.

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RIDE ALONG FOR UPDATES ON OUR LONG-TERM FLEET

SPECS 2014 Kia Soul (!)



PAUL LAGUETTE

CO2 emissions **0.75** lb/mi	MT figure eight 28.1 sec @ 0.62 g (avg)
8.6 sec 0-60 mph	16.6 sec Quarter mile 84.3 mph
114 ft Braking distance, 60-0 mph	

Vehicle Layout Front-engine, FWD, 5-pass, 4-door hatchback
Engine 2.0L/164-hp/151-lb-ft DOHC 16-valve I-4
Transmission 6-speed automatic
Curb Weight (F/R Dist) 3,076 lb (60/40%)
Lateral Acceleration 0.80 g (avg)
Energy Cons., City/Hwy 147/109 kW-hrs/100 miles





2014 Mazda3 S Grand Touring Brian Vance



"These are good days for five-door fans–Kia, Hyundai, Ford, and VW all offer compelling alternatives to this '3."

Service life / 7 mo/15,616 mi
Avg CO2 / 0.63 lb/mi
Energy cons / 110 kW-hrs/100mi
Unresolved problems / None
Maintenance cost / $78.88 (oil change, tire rotation, inspection)
Normal-wear cost / $0
Base price / $27,290 **As tested** / $30,285

EPA CITY/HWY/COMB FUEL ECON: 28/38/32 MPG | **AVERAGE FUEL ECON** 30.7 MPG

Suddenly we've a new king in the halls of *MT*. Well ... at least a new hatchback king.

You see, my esteemed colleague Benson "Gary" Kong produced an eye-opening hatchback Big Test in our November 2014 issue. An almost identical version of this car battled it out with a field of five, but lost its usual comparo crown to our newest Car of the Year, the 2015 Volkswagen Golf. While the Golf deserves this top-shelf honor, by no means is the '3 ready to drive quietly into our parking garage and pretend it doesn't have numerous comparo wins under its belt, some of these dating back to its 2004 arrival. The '3 is very much still a top pick, and if you dig deeper into Kong's comparo, you'll see why. Its *MT* Real MPG results show it trumping the Golf by 3 miles per gallon. Kong also noted the impressively bolstered rear seats, easy-to-swing-up rear hatch, a sophisticated crash avoidance system using brake support and forward obstruction warning, and an EPA combined output of 31 mpg. In addition, the '3's IntelliChoice cost of 5-year ownership came in at $35,045, almost $3,000 less than the Golf ($37,916).

Ever since the new Mk7 Golf arrived, I've spent a fair amount of time with it, driven the TDI and electric versions, and have even blown a few lunch breaks building/pricing a GTI on the web. Prior to this new Golf, the Mazda was the no-brainer, first round-pick, but now the hatchback choice has become more difficult. J.D. Power's predicted reliability for the '3 is double that of the Golf (four Power Circles to the Golf's two), but the Golf has a more refined, sophisticated curb appeal. It's the more handsome of the two cars, the one an aesthetically minded buyer would more likely consider.

Regardless, no one wants to be second place, and no doubt Mazda is going to get right back on its horse and start gunning for another win over the Golf. Kong says this can be achieved by minimizing road noise, adding better folding seat actuators, refining the interior craftsmanship, and increasing the rear-seat passenger comfort.



Ten spokes on each wheel means there are 40 of them to wash during a Sunday sponge session.



ROBIN TRAJANO



ROBIN TRAJANO

ARRIVAL 2015 NISSAN VERSA NOTE SR Alex Nishimoto



"The SR's standard driver-side armrest is a gift from above when I'm stuck in traffic on my daily commute." @MT_NishiMOTOR

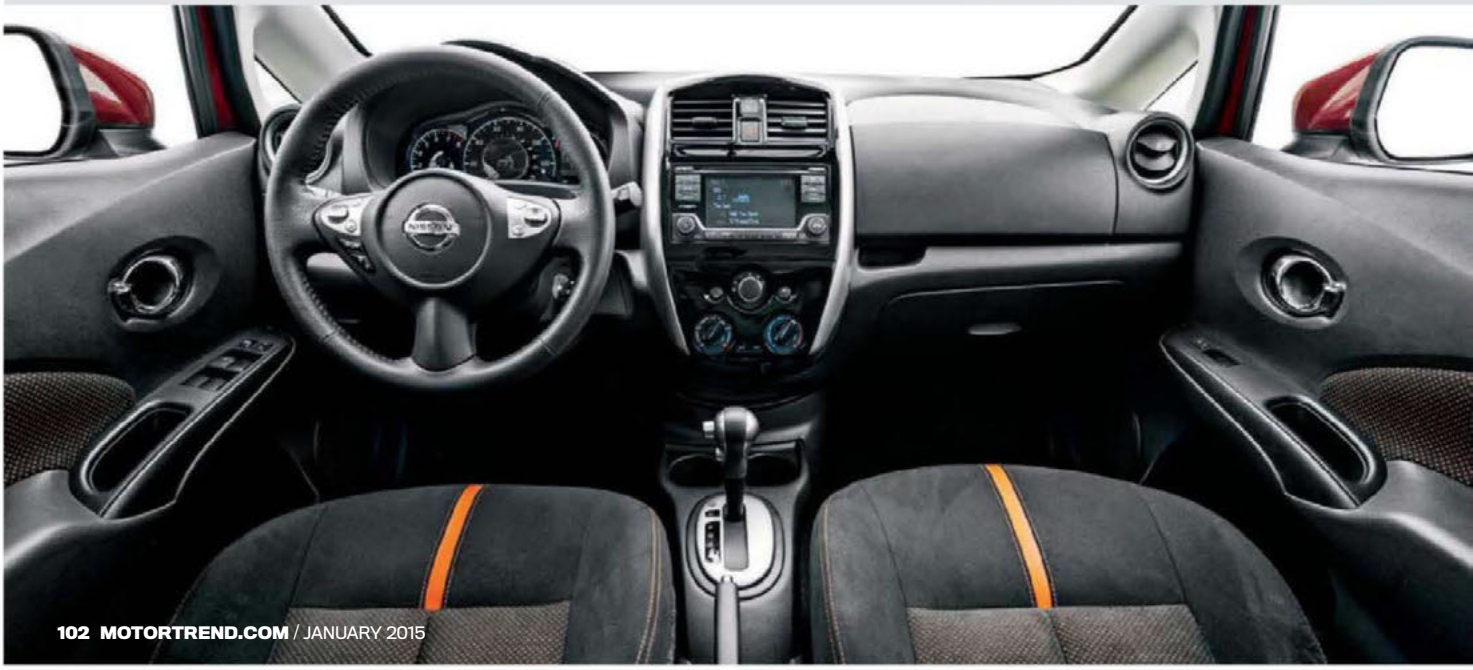
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB FUEL ECON 31/40/35 **BASE PRICE** $18,340
PRICE AS TESTED $19,180

Until the Note hatchback model arrived on the scene last year, the Nissan Versa was never big on style. Visually, the Note is markedly improved over the frumpy Versa sedan, but if you're looking for similarities between the two cars, you won't find many. The car was snatched directly from the Japanese market to replace the old Versa hatch and shares little with its three-box cousin besides its platform, engine, and name badge.

We took delivery of a 2015 Nissan Versa Note SR to find out what the newcomer brings to the B-segment table. The SR trim level adds sportier looks but no more performance over a standard Versa Note. New black-accented, 16-inch alloy wheels, a unique roof spoiler, and a more aggressive-looking front end change the Versa Note's appearance, but the experience behind the wheel is much the same. The last Note SL model we tested, which boasted the same 109-hp, 1.6-liter I-4 as the SR, hit 60 mph from a standstill in 10.4 seconds and completed the quarter mile in 17.8 seconds at 78.2 mph. Push the Note hard, and you'll be treated to a buzzy, monotone wail as the CVT works its shiftless magic. But being gutless is par for the subcompact course. There is one upside to the Versa Note SR's lack of thrust: It retains the 31/40 mpg city/highway rating of the standard model.

The extra equipment that comes with the $660 SR Convenience package will be put to use during the Note's yearlong stay in our fleet. The package includes features such as a 5-inch screen, rearview camera, SiriusXM satellite radio capability, and Bluetooth streaming audio. Those last two features will be more than welcome on the long trips I intend to take in the Versa Note.





SPECS 2015 Nissan Versa Note SR



PAUL LAGUETTE

CO2 emissions **0.56** lb/mi	MT figure eight 28.9 sec @ 0.57 g (avg)
10.3 sec 0-60 mph	17.7 sec Quarter mile 78.7 mph
122 ft Braking distance, 60-0 mph	

Vehicle Layout Front-engine, FWD, 5-pass, 4-door hatchback
Engine 1.6L/109-hp/107-lb-ft DOHC 16-valve I-4
Transmission Cont. variable auto
Curb Weight (F/R Dist) 2,503 lb (60/40%)
Lateral Acceleration 0.76 g (avg)
Energy Cons., City/Hwy 109/84 kW-hrs/100 miles



The brick red exterior complements the SR's sporty touches and matches the red stripes of the special cloth-upholstered seats. But the added style doesn't come cheap. The 2015 Nissan Versa Note SR starts at $18,340, and our tester with the Convenience package and $180 floor and cargo mats rings up at $19,180. That's a lot of coin for such a little car.

While it's true the Versa Note brings the nameplate forward in terms of looks, the question of whether it outshines all others in the subcompact class remains. The Versa has led the subcompact sales race for years, but in *Motor Trend* comparison tests, the car has never finished better than mid-pack. In my 12 months with the Versa Note SR, I hope to find out whether this new model can change that—and whether it's more than just a pretty face.





2014 Volkswagen Passat Sport Emiliana Sandoval



"The Passat's power windows have Pinch Protection so fingers don't get smushed." @Emiliana505

Service life / 5 mo/ 6,048 mi
Avg CO2 / 0.73 lb/mi
Energy cons / 127 kW-hrs/100 mi
Unresolved problems / None
Maintenance cost / $0
Normal-wear cost / $0
Base price / $28,495 **As tested** / $28,730

EPA CITY/HWY/COMB FUEL ECON: 24/34/28 MPG | **AVERAGE FUEL ECON** 26.6 MPG

Our Passat Sport doesn't have on-screen nav (it's available on the SE but not the Sport), and as I'm a relative newcomer to Los Angeles, I frequently need navigational assistance, and I want to see a map of where I'm going. Lucky for me my smartphone fills the void efficiently, albeit unattractively. I attach my iPhone to the left side of the center stack air conditioning vent by sliding it into my Kenu Airframe car mount, which clips onto the vent. Then I plug the phone into the 12V outlet located in the little storage compartment on the bottom of the center stack using a cheap cord I bought at a drugstore, and connect it to a USB car charger. Since my phone is synched to the car via Bluetooth, turn-by-turn nav directions from the Waze app are broadcast over the stereo speakers, and I can see the Waze map onscreen out of the corner of my right eye—it's at eye level, whereas the infotainment touchscreen is down and to my right, diverting my eyes from the road. The setup isn't cute, though, with the cord dangling in front of the touchscreen. Also more than once I've left the phone in the car by accident.

I could put the phone in its designated charging spot in the center console, but the provided cord is only 5 inches long, so the phone either has to stay closed away in the compartment or dangle awkwardly outside it. Either way I can't see the Waze map. So, yeah, I wish nav were an option on the Sport.



The tire alert light came on recently. All four tires were indeed low, so I added air and reset the light.

The Passat came with six months of complimentary Car-Net access, which offers call-button destination assistance. A live person will send your destination directly to the nav system, but since ours doesn't have nav, I couldn't test it. Car-Net also has automatic crash notification if an air bag is deployed, and you can press the SOS emergency call button to reach VW's Emergency Response Center or the wrench button to summon roadside assistance.





JESSICA WALKER

My jerry-rigged navigation setup using the Waze app.

ROBIN TRAJANO

2015 Kia K900 Zach Gale

"A long overall driving range isn't the K900 V-8's forte, but it does get attention at gas stations and car washes around town."
@zachgale

Service life / 5 mo/8,170 mi
Avg CO2 / 1.14 lb/mi
Energy cons / 198 kW-hrs/100 mi
Unresolved problems / None
Maintenance cost / $0 (oil change, rotate tires, inspection)
Normal-wear cost / $0
Base price / $60,400 **As tested** / $66,400

EPA CITY/HWY/COMB FUEL ECON: 15/23/18 MPG
AVERAGE FUEL ECON 17.0 MPG

Daily driving a 2015 Kia K900 V-8 has its perks, but if there were one or two elements of ownership I would magically change, they'd be the fuel economy, the size of the fuel tank, or both. My gripe has nothing to do with the price of gas but rather how much my time as a $66,400-car-driving commuter is worth. I wanted to find out just how good the K900's fuel economy really was, so the Real MPG team tested the 420-hp sedan with regular and premium gas to determine whether we'd see a difference.

After RTFM-ing, I learned that Kia allows the use of 87-octane gas but notes 91-octane gas will yield "improved vehicle performance." It turns out that, at least in our Real MPG tests, the difference in mileage with 87 and 91 on the K900 V-8 is so small that it is within the margin of error in our testing. Since the fuel economy doesn't vary much from 87 to 91, I'll have to accept that part of the driving experience of this respectably executed eight-cylinder luxury sedan is visiting gas stations a few more times per year than I would driving other equally quick vehicles in its class.

MICHAEL SHAFFER

"In L.A. traffic, I would rather dance with three pedals than cope with a stumbling dual-clutch gearbox."
@nate_martinez

Service life / 4 mo/8,558 mi
Avg CO2 / 0.93 lb/mi
Energy cons / 161 kW-hrs/100 mi
Unresolved problems / None
Maintenance cost / $0 (oil change, inspection)
Normal-wear cost / $0
Base price / $38,190 **As tested** / $38,190

EPA CITY/HWY/COMB FUEL ECON: 17/23/19 MPG
AVERAGE FUEL ECON 21.9 MPG

***MT* boss Edward Loh** and I recently swapped rides for the weekend. There are glaring differences between the STI and his long-term BMW M3, the most significant of which is the $40,000 price discrepancy. There are similarities, however. The two are some of the most powerful, pricey, and sporty loaners in our fleet. They look mean. They wear fancy footwear. They're turbocharged. But where the Bavarian's power arrives early, smoothly, and evenly over its rev band, the STI's boxer prefers to punch you. Full force jabs come at 3,500 rpm but peter off in potency as revs build. The M3 is poised. The STI is brutish. The M3 is a honed hunter donning brilliant $8,150 carbon-ceramic brakes. The STI is nearly as balanced, but it will never match the M3's precision and tenacity.

The M3, though boisterous, isn't STI boisterous. Its exhaust note is artificially inflected. It's creaky inside, too. The DCT stumbles in traffic. The STI's hand-built gearbox consistently shifts crisply, and its helm communicates so eloquently. I'd say the STI offers roughly 84.1 percent of the M3's performance for $40,000 less, and it matches its entertainment quotient entirely. Let me not forget about the STI's rear wing and reverse camera. Our $80,000 German gets neither.

Our STI turns heads–even kitty ones. Alfie approves.



MORGAN SEGAL

2014 Cadillac ATS 2.0T Scott Burgess



"Driving from Detroit to Ocala in the Cadillac ATS we've already passed Needmore Road and Big Bone Lick Park."
@Autocritic

This long-term loan was shorter than most at just eight months instead of the typical year. But somehow between judging different of the Year vehicles for *Motor Trend* and attending auto shows and programs, the Detroit office managed to put more than 15,000 miles on our 2014 Cadillac ATS.

The verdict in a nutshell: The ATS is a sexy little luxury sports sedan. Whether traversing snow and ice, acting as a daily commuter, or serving as a comforting road-trip buddy, the ATS met every challenge with a quiet ride, decent fuel economy, and plenty of power at the ready.

Service Life / 8 mo / 15,300 mi
Base Price / $43,020
Options / CUE and Navigation ($945), 18-in aluminum wheels ($800), Cold Weather Package ($600: heated front seats, heated steering wheel), Majestic Plum Metallic paint ($495)
Price As Tested / $45,860
Avg Econ/CO2 / 25.9 mpg / 0.75 lb/mi
Energy Cons / 160/109 kW-hrs/100 mi
Problem Areas / None
Maintenance Cost / $0 (3-oil change, inspection; 1-tire rotation)
Normal-Wear Cost / $0
3-Year Residual Value* / $18,344
Recalls / Automatic transmission shift cable, front seat bracket

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It also passed the most important test. When I took my dog, Bogart, on a road trip, he thoroughly enjoyed the backseat, which I covered with a bedsheet. My German shepherd slept like a 110-pound puppy most of the 350 miles of highway driving, only waking up a few times to stick his nose out the window and catch a sniff of Lake Superior.

The ATS handles excellently. It has a 50/50 front-to-rear weight balance, giving it a handling snap that is quite noticeable on any road surface. Our test model included GM's 2.0-liter turbocharged direct-injection four-cylinder engine and six-speed automatic transmission. There's a good reason we see GM using this powertrain in so many other vehicles, and we find it preferable to the 3.6-liter V-6 available for this car.

The four-banger creates 272 horsepower and 260 lb-ft of torque, which is more than enough power to push around this 3,404-pound sedan. The electric variable-ratio power steering has a nicely weighted feel, especially on the highway, where the ATS really stands out as a fantastic two-person-and-one-dog touring car. The second row is pretty small for adults but would be fine for kids. Rear legroom is 33.5 inches, and headroom drops from 38.6 inches in the front to 36.8 in the





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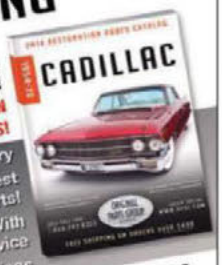
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The Big Picture



STAR POWER

Mercedes-Benz goes into overdrive

If there's a niche, fill it. And if there isn't a niche, create a new one. That's the mantra at Mercedes-Benz these days. Thirty years ago Mercedes' entire lineup—190E, E-Class, S-Class, SEC, SL, G-Wagen—would have fit in a modest showroom. Today you'd need one of those giant faux-marble garaj mahals beloved of auto-alley mavens to house the 15 models now carrying the three-pointed star.

And more are coming.

Daimler AG will launch no fewer than 11 all-new Mercedes models—vehicles that currently have no counterpart in the existing lineup, says Mercedes-Benz sales and marketing chief Ola Källenius—by 2020. And existing model families will be expanded: The recently launched S-Class plug-in hybrid is the first of 10 plug-in hybrid-powered Mercedes vehicles to be launched over the next three years. The next-gen GLK and M-Class SUV families will grow to include sporty, coupe-like variants to compete with BMW's X6 and X4.

The new Mercedes-AMG GT, Daimler's 911-fighter, will evolve into a model range aimed at the heart of Porsche's iconic sports car. Expect GT and GT S convertibles, a track-focused version to take on the 911 GT3, and an ultra-high-performance model, possibly with all-wheel drive, to challenge the 911 Turbo. There are even whispers the GT platform could be stretched to create a four-door coupe to compete with Porsche's Panamera.

The XXL S-Class launched at the L.A. show and badged Mercedes-Maybach will be joined this year by an even larger version: The Mercedes-Maybach Pullman will be almost 3 feet longer than the regular long wheelbase S-Class, hand-built by German tuner Brabus with a base price rumored to be around $600,000.

The three-pointed star is also expanding into segments that were once the heartland of mainstream automakers such as GM and Ford. About 75 percent of buyers of the entry-level CLA sedan, which costs about the same as a well-equipped Ford Fusion, are first-time Mercedes buyers, for example. (Audi's claiming an almost identical percentage of conquest sales in the U.S. for the new A3 sedan. Numbers like these should be cause for concern at Chevy and Ford. Toyota and Honda, too.)

Despite the success of compact vehicles such as the CLA sedan and GLA SUV, Daimler has no intention of chasing mainstream automakers into smaller vehicle segments with Mercedes. That's a job for Smart, which recently revealed an all-new Forfour four-door, built on a new rear-engine, rear-drive platform shared with Renault's Twingo city car. "We have no plans to go below A-Class," Källenius says. "We have no [Fiesta-sized] car planned with the three-pointed star on it."

You won't see the three-pointed star on a mid-engine supercar, either. A mid-engine Mercedes-Benz rival to the Porsche 918, McLaren P1, and LaFerrari hybrid hypercars seems a no-brainer, especially given Daimler's expensive investment in Formula 1 hybrid technology. But senior Daimler sources categorically rule out the idea: "We will never build a mid-engine car," vows one. That leaves two alternative scenarios: Daimler develops a brand-new front-engine Mercedes-AMG hypercar with all-wheel drive and an advanced 700-900-hp hybrid powertrain. Or it buys Aston Martin.

Daimler already has a deal in place to supply engines to the storied British sports car maker, which badly needs a wealthy patron. And newly minted Aston CEO Andy Palmer, Nissan's former product chief, enjoys deep relationships with Stuttgart thanks to his oversight of various Daimler/Renault-Nissan alliance projects. (The next-gen Mercedes A-Class will come off a platform jointly developed by the alliance partners.)

Daimler could afford to keep Aston Martin very exclusive, using it to blunt both Bentley and Ferrari (and not just with sports cars; an Aston Martin Lagonda sedan could take on the Bentley Flying Spur and Ferrari FF) while Mercedes-Maybach concentrates on attacking Rolls-Royce and Mercedes-AMG goes after Porsche. A mid-engine Aston Martin supercar? Why not? The idea was floated more than a decade ago.

Jaguar design chief Ian Callum, the man who penned the gorgeous DB7, DB9, and Vanquish while at Aston, still has the drawings ... ■

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